

India Herald

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Raj Kumar Syal (1934-2020)

HOUSTON

Raj Kumar Syal, considered a pillar of the Houston Hindu community, died at the age of 86 on Oct. 1.

He is survived by his wife, Krishna Syal, three children and two grand children.

Reacting to the loss of her life partner, Krishna Syal said, "He was a good man."

Due to Covid-19, private funeral service is set for Oct. 10, to be attended by close family members.

Raj Syal moved to Houston in 1963. He is the founder of Hindus of Greater Houston, co-founder of India Culture Center and Hindu Worship Society.

Raj Syal conceived the idea of celebrating Jannashami festival in 1969 with the motto "Bringing Hindus together," celebrating Lord Krishna and fostering unity and harmony among all.

His sincere efforts in establishing and running community service organizations earned him the deep respect of the entire community.

Hindus of Greater Houston especially owes its gratitude to him for his pioneering efforts as the community leader. And deservedly, Hindus of Greater Houston conferred him with the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014.

Syal was born in 1934 and



Raj Syal

after early education in the village Bilga near Ludhiana, Syal graduated from DAV College, Jalandhar, Punjab. He continued his education at Texas A & M University and the University of Houston.

Both Kulkarni adds,

"Raj Kumar Syal-ji, beloved, long-time Indian-American resident of the Houston area and most recently of The Woodlands, was one of the earliest Indian-Americans in Houston arriving in the 1960's. He was a leader and an active volunteer, in addition to working for the Texas Department of Highways (now known as TxDOT.)

Among his best service to the local community was bringing Indian films to the University of Houston campus for the benefit of the students and families who were home-

sick for India and its culture, forerunner of Sri Mooknashi Temple in Pearland as well as Hindu Worship Society in Houston.

In 1973, he was one of the founders of the India Culture Center and in 1989 he co-founded the Hindus of Greater Houston.

Raj Syal was not merely a leader who only provided helpful guidance again and again to the organizations he helped found, but he performed many tasks that others might consider menial.

He helped design the first parking driveway at Sri Mooknashi Temple, and turned the dirt poured the asphalt to construct the driveway. He climbed on top of the roof of Hindu Worship Society to repair the roof.

Syal personally cooked what proved as the temple numerous times. He did not consider himself too "high" to clean temple bathrooms before people arrived on Sundays. In his later years, he was a member of the Hindu Temple of The Woodlands Service Forum where he always had a smile and a pleasant word for all.

Raj Syal was truly a Sevak and an inspiration to the entire Indian-American and Hindu-American community. We will greatly miss him."

A tribute to Raj Kumar Syal

By Shamy V. Shetty

In my long years of social work both in India and the US, I have not come across someone like Raj Syal whom we, the Indian community lost on October 1st. To state that he was a model social worker is a huge understatement. Despite his long years of association with India Culture Center for which he has rendered yeoman service, he never wished to go after the position of president or secretary. He never craved for any publicity and he worked always unobtrusively.

ICC had a small house in Fondren Southwest in 80s. When I took over the presidency of ICC, I was shocked to learn that Raj Syal was driving all the way from Clear Lake to mow the lawn every week. When the house needed any maintenance, he was always there to help ICC.

At any meetings of ICC, when all the participants including the office bearers have left, Raj Syal was there to clean the premises to avoid any penalty. When any Indian family was in distress Syal was always ready to render any assistance.

When the office bearers of ICC realized that for a growing Indian community, the house in Fondren Southwest was not enough, it was Syal who took the initiative to raise funds to buy a larger plot. Finally when the idea of the current India House was floated, Syal convinced the group members to support it by handing over the funds collected.

When ICC organized any major function it was always taken for granted that Raj Syal was available to take major responsibilities. Often he was not even asked if he can help. It was simply assumed that he would get involved in implementing difficult tasks. Raj Syal always liked to work behind the scenes shunning any visibility. Even when he was urged to sit with the dignitaries, he refused and avoided all public limelight. I am sure that many are likely to wonder if there was indeed such an assuming, humble human being.

Raj Syal had two dreams. One was that ICC will really be an institution which will bring all Indian organizations under one umbrella. The other was an even bigger dream of Houston Indians bringing under one roof Hindu temple, Christian church, Muslim Mosque, Sikh Gurdwara, Jain Temple, Buddhist Vihara, etc for all to experience the real vibrant cultural message of unity in diversity. Despite all his attempts they have remained as unfulfilled dream.

Soon after ICC instituted "best social service" award, the first recipient was Raj Syal. This speaks volumes about how Indian community valued his contribution. When future history of Indian Americans from Houston is written, Raj Syal's selfless and dedicated contribution to the community will be given ample space.

(Shamy V. Shetty was past president of India Culture Center, Houston.)



Raj, Krishna, Rajinder (in blue), Rajinder Krishna (in black), Roopinder Krishna (in orange)