



## Lifestyle/Features

Pradeep Anand has written *An Indian in Cowboy Country*.

JOHNNY HANSON: FOR THE CHRONICLE



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Migration Under the Radar

### One man, two cultures

Indian-American engineer writes about his experiences in both his native land and his adopted home in Texas

By JEANNIE KEVER

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## HOUSTON'S SOUTH ASIANS

Casual readers might think Pradeep Anand's first book is autobiographical, and who could blame them?

It's about a student in Mumbai, India, back when the city was known as Bombay. A graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology who came to Texas for graduate school at the University of Houston. A man who built a successful career in the energy industry while straddling two cultures.

All describe Anand, an entrepreneur and consultant who has spent the past 29 years in Houston and its suburbs, at the vanguard of a migration that has remained largely under the city's radar.

But many readers in Houston's large and growing immigrant community say *An Indian in Cowboy Country* is about their lives, as well.

"I find it to be my story," says Vikram Shete, an engineering graduate student at the University of Houston who arrived here from India 2½ years ago. "He mentioned the way they eat back home. I remember my mother serving me food. Those were my trains, my apartment."

For the record, Anand, 57, says the book of linked short stories isn't an autobiography but a

reflection of the experiences of everyone who, like him, came from outside the mainstream.

Nandan Nilekani, one of the founders of Infosys Technologies Limited — an information technology services company that in 1999 became the first Indian company listed on an American stock exchange — described the book in an introduction as "an Asian Indian's journey in an alien society, simultaneously maintaining one's moorings and moral center."

Anand retains the courtly formality of his upbringing, but he's a thoroughly modern guy.

"When I came to the United States, people were surprised I spoke English," he said. Today, they're surprised when he travels without a laptop computer.

"Today, if you're Indian, you're considered to be an engineer, a techie," he said. "But it wasn't that way then."

Anand is an engineer, and he has spent his career in the energy industry. He joined the executive search firm Preng & Associates in July, and he is still winding up work for clients at Seeta Resources, the consulting firm he founded in 1994.

His business experience percolates throughout the book as a young immigrant named Satish Sharma grows up in Bombay and moves to Houston.

Preng & Associates founder David Preng said he recommended the book to several dozen energy executives for its insights into not only the immigrant experience — the lives of one segment of their work force — but also into business and ethics.

Preng was at Brazos Bookstore recently, offering another endorsement to several dozen people who had come to hear Anand read and discuss the book.

"I don't read a lot (of fiction), because I read a lot of technical stuff," he said. "But I couldn't put it down."

Before leaving India, where he earned a degree in metallurgical engineering from IIT and worked for several years, Anand was also known as an award-winning writer.

Then he moved to the United States, "and it almost seemed I lost my muse," he said.

"When I moved to Houston, I lost my entire environment," he said. "Everything I had assumed about me as a child disappeared when I landed at IAH with two suitcases."

Several years ago, he found a book on writing and rediscovered his muse. He started writing *An Indian in Cowboy Country* the next morning.

The 10 stories are split between Bombay and Houston/Sugar Land, as the main character finds both success and discrimination in Texas. In one story, the boss praises the character while denying him a promotion because "the oil industry will never accept an Indian as chief."

Anand says nothing so blatant ever happened to him, although he's certainly overheard similar statements.

But really, he said, the book "has less to do with race than with assimilating in an ever-changing world."

He passed the completed book to Chitra Divakaruni, a neighbor and acclaimed author of books including *The Vine of Desire*, *Sister of My Heart* and *The Mistress of Spices*. She encouraged him to have it published.

By then, the book had already passed the most important test. His wife, Sujata, "is my first reader, and she liked it."

Their daughter, Seema, is a junior at Clements High School, and Anand said he hopes *An Indian in Cowboy Country* helped her to understand his experiences.

"I grew up in India," he said. "It's very different from growing up in Sugar Land."

Nevertheless, the family retains close ties, both familial and cultural, to India, traveling there every year.

Since the book's release late last year, Anand has done conference calls with book clubs all over the country. He's spoken at Rice University and at the Woodlands Wine and Debate Club.

He was invited to speak at Harvard University last spring as part of a discussion of how writers depict the Indian Diaspora.

All that's been fun, but mostly, the impact has been more subtle.

"It's humbled me," he said, because people have given their time to read the book and talk about it. "It came from the heart."

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Houston's South Asian population has grown since Pradeep Anand moved here in 1978

- **By the numbers:** Some 75,000 Asians of Indian descent live in the area
  - **Education:** 67 percent hold a bachelor's degree or higher
  - **Median household income:** About \$67,000, compared with the area's overall medium income of \$50,250
  - **Source:** U.S. Census, 2006 figures
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