

Book Release & Release through Music

Stafford Civic Center was the site of Pradeep Anand's book release and a Client Appreciation music performance hosted by David Raj of Ameriprise Financial services

By PRAMOD KULKARNI

HOUSTON: More than 700 people attended a special event at the Stafford Civic Center that included a book release function for debut novelist Pradeep Anand followed by a Client Appreciation musical concert hosted by Ameriprise Financial.

Anand's novel is entitled *An Indian in Cowboy Country* (see book review on this page). Anand is recognized in the community as an entrepreneur, activist in community, cultural and political activities, and founder-member of organizations such as IIT-AGH and TIE.

Emcee Subodh Bhuchar introduced Anand to the audience. During a Q&A session on stage, Anand said he always had a passion for writing, but the inspiration to write his novel came after he went to a Barnes & Noble bookstore to calm his nerves when he was run off the road during a thunderstorm.

Anand presented the first book to his daughter Seema, who reminisced about how she used to watch her father write as he looked out the window.

An interesting part of the book release presentation was the dramatic reading of passages from the book by actors Yaksha Bhatt and Amit Patel.

Anand signed hundreds of books for his friends and well-wishers during the cocktail hour and after the book release presentation. The book is available at Barnes & Noble stores and online at both Barnes & Noble and Amazon.com

Subsequently, an audio-visual presentation was staged about



Author Pradeep Anand (far right) signed hundreds of his books for a long line of purchasers.



Omkar (left), Imtiaz Munshi, Mauli and David Raj perform the popular song "Beedi" from the movie *Omkara*.

Vibha, a charity organization that supports primary education and vocational training for underprivileged children in India

Ameriprise Financial's musical concert consisted of alternating sets of Indian pop and Western rock music sets. University of Houston students Omkar and Mauli got the musical portion of the evening to a rollicking start

with several energetic numbers. Indian music performers included Hemant Dave, Imtiaz Munshi, Sreemathy Ranganathan, Anirudha Pangarkar, Subodh Bhuchar and Rizwan. The Western music was performed by David Raj, Eugene Balakirov, Chas Cahn and Lakshman Rao. Hors d'oeuvres of batatawadas, sandwiches and chicken were catered by Dakshin Restaurant.

BOOK REVIEW

Streets of Bombay to Suburbia of Sugar Land

By PRAMOD KULKARNI

A novel written by an engineer? Most literary enthusiasts can be expected to shy away from the prospect of reading a book by an engineer other than a technical manual or, at the most, a who-dunnit thriller.

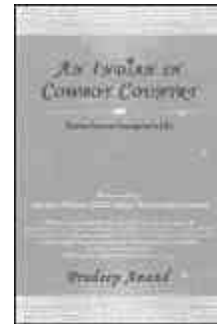
Contrary to conventional wisdom, in *An Indian in Cowboy Country*, author Pradeep Anand has penned a sensitive, moving portrayal of the coming of age of an Indian from the streets of Bombay to life as an immigrant engineer in the Texas "cowboy country" that characterized the oilfield services industry during its downturn in the 1980s.

The novel's protagonist, Satish Sharma, holds his own against the oilfield cowboys and cajuns, and an uncomfortable race-tinged office atmosphere, and ultimately, finds success in the diversity of Sugar Land.

Besides the journey of career success through tough times, *An Indian in Cowboy Country* is the story of love lost and love gained, as well as an unusual spiritual journey.

Anand's novel consists of nine stories that are progressive as well as episodes that can stand on their own. The novel begins with *Rites of Passage*, the story of a teenage Satish Sharma and his ethnically diverse group of friends who come face-to-face with a violent aspect of communal prejudice.

The subsequent stories trace Sharma's progression through college at IIT, working for a multina-



tional company in India, and a spiritual pilgrimage. The novel then continues the hero's life journey in Houston, Texas.

What Sharma faced on the streets of Bombay he sees beneath the surface in the office politics of an oilfield services company before the Age of Diversity.

A reader who is unfamiliar with the Indian immigrant experience or the oilfield industry will be fascinated by the vivid descriptions of life in those days that some of us have experienced, but will enjoy brought to life in Anand's prose.

An Indian in Cowboy Country draws substantially from Pradeep Anand's own life experiences. These experiences provide rich material, but also impose a drawback in terms of pushing the envelope in exploring human frailty in the face of life's challenges in a new land.

Anand has created a straight-as-an-arrow hero, who is as principled as Lord Ram would have been in a Texas *vanvas*. Anticipating a spicy novel, I was hoping our hero would cheat on his college exam, lose his love through an extramarital affair, or at least, take safety shortcuts in designing an oilfield tool.

Anand has, instead, created a safe novel that will not send IIT officials scurrying through their old records or cause any discomfiture for his family and friends.

I hope that the success of his first novel will encourage Anand to continue his fiction writing. With constraints of the autobiographical experiences removed, he will be free to explore new literary frontiers in creating stories of the immigrant experience. *Pramod Kulkarni*