

*Remarks to the
Indian Community Annual Gathering
November 4, 2001*

Thank you, Seetha, for the invitation to join you here tonight.

Since September 11, there's been a lot of talk about diversity and community. These two topics seem to be opposites, but they should be closely entwined.

Diversity is defined as “a point or respect in which things differ.” Community is defined, in one aspect, as “a group of people having common interests.”

Diversity can exist within a community, and that co-existence is healthy for a community. The sharing of ideas, culture, religion, and history is the foundation for a strong community.

Our foundation in Mississippi is built on blacks, whites, Hispanics, Indians, Asians, Christians, Muslims, Jews. It is built on a difficult history and an exciting promise for the future.

Now more than ever, we need to keep that foundation intact. I appreciate the work you have done in this area.

The Indian community in Jackson and across the state has contributed so much over the years. Seetha is doing a tremendous job running the University Press of Mississippi, continuing the great traditions of literature in our state.

At the greatest hospital in the country, the University of Mississippi Medical Center, Indian physicians are setting the standard in research, surgery, and other medical specialties.

From the family-owned grocery to the labs at UMC, members of the Indian community are contributing so much to the strength of our community foundation.

And since the beginning of our nation's current struggle against terrorism, you have been on the front lines of education for the rest of our community, sharing the basic truths of your faith, your culture, your religion, and your heritage.

You have helped remind us of the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, that we should judge others on the content of their character, not on the color of their skin.

I'm thankful for the work you've been doing, and continue to do. I believe the message has been getting out, and we are seeing a new level of respect, interest and appreciation for the diversity of our community.

Mississippi and America are stepping back, taking a new and long overdue look at the ingredients for our community's foundation, and realizing that within the diversity is a common thread.

There's an old Yiddish proverb that says,
“everyone is kneaded out of the same dough
but not baked in the same oven.”

Our diversity and our community are
combined to make something special,
something that makes our nation great.

It is our willingness to reach out to each
other, to share our diversity, that helps us
achieve the goals we set for ourselves.

Now, more than ever, we have to be there
for each other.

Indira Gandhi told us, “you can’t shake hands with a clenched fist.” My hands are open; your hands are open. Let’s keep them that way.

Diversity, community, respect. These are the watchwords for us today. They remind us of who and what we are, and we must remember that.

Thank you for the invitation to be with you.

