

Thank you so much. It may look as if I am here by myself but there are many people up here with me – my Radcliffe sisters, the Unitarian Universalist Association that supports me and the Holdeen India Program and especially my courageous, committed colleagues in India. I am a third-generation Cliffy, and my grandmother and mother are also here. This honor is yours.

54 years ago I had the privilege of studying at Radcliffe. Since then I've been working with those who did not have such privilege. I live, love and work in 2 different worlds. I am not talking about the U.S. and India but the worlds of the privileged and the poor. So I want to flip the title of this symposium and talk with you about my journey, "Finding Different Ground – Discovering Common Truths".

Let me tell you about Deuben. I met her in Gujarat in 1988. She was 25 and had been married for 13 years to Manubhai who was from the same untouchable, now called dalit, caste as she. Her father had to borrow money for her dowry; she then had to move to her husband's village, where she was an outsider, and totally dependent on his family. They controlled all aspects of her life, even deciding when the couple had intercourse. Deuben had already given birth 9 times and had 5 surviving daughters. Manubhai's family demanded she keep trying to have a son. Traditionally families celebrate the birth of a son and mourn the birth of a daughter. Midwives may even receive twice as much if they deliver a boy. Girls and women are seen as inferior, not valued, a burden. Therefore parents don't invest in their food, health or education. Deuben and her daughters were severely malnourished and suffered from a variety of untreated diseases. Deuben had never been to school and saw no reason to send her daughters. They were needed in the fields. The children worked alongside their parents as agricultural day laborers from 7 AM till sunset. In addition, Deuben did the landlord's, as well as her own, household work. She routinely walked 20 kilometers/day just to collect water and firewood.

After the harvesting season, the family migrated to the brick kilns where her children carried bricks weighing 25 pounds on their head. Deuben was paid 20 rupees (43 cents) and Manubhai 40 rupees for a day's work but he collected her wages and often used them to drink and gamble. Her husband and her employers often beat her. She was afraid of all of them. As a dalit, she suffered the triple burden of gender, class and caste.

The caste system is the world's oldest social hierarchy – with Brahmins at the top and untouchables, or dalits, at the bottom. Though the practice of untouchability has been abolished by the Indian constitution, it remains at the core of Indian rural life. Dalits cannot cross the line that divides their part of the village from the upper castes. They may not enter the same temples and many public places like schools and health centers. They may not even draw water from the same wells. This social order is so entrenched that even in disasters like the recent tsunami, dalits are forced from refugee camps and not allowed to drink water from tanks supplied by UNICEF. There are 164 million dalits in India.

Deuben had no awareness of her rights, no voice nor power to demand them, no control over her body, her family, her work, her life, and no hope for change. And it's been this

way for hundreds of years. And there are hundreds of millions of Deubens– in India and in the world.

How do we respond to this challenge of massive, persistent poverty and injustice? How can we promote change in this complex and difficult context? Since you are all engaged in philanthropy -- love of mankind -- you may question who decides how your money is being used, or “*Where has all the money gone?*” Aid agencies and the Indian government have developed thousands of “projects” supposedly for the poor. In reality the powerful – politicians, business, contractors, landlords – take advantage of these resources at the expense of the most vulnerable groups. This kind of aid does not reach the poorest. The most disadvantaged don’t even know that such projects exist or they are unable to use them. Consider the don’t give a person a fish but teach HIM how to fish theory, how does it benefit the poor to teach them improved methods of fishing or farming if they have no access to ponds or lands in which to do so? How does it benefit a woman to get a loan if her husband controls the money? The government has many charitable programs but rarely enforces laws promoting poor women’s rights to basic resources, jobs or education.

We hear a lot about India’s growing economy, its increased wealth and technology boom. This is true as long as we’re talking about the top 10% of the population. We hear the assumption that economic growth per se results in a decrease in poverty. However, in the past few years India has actually gone down in the UN’s human development index that measures the standard of living in all countries. Indeed, 79% of Indians, or over 800 million people earn less than \$2/day. India’s fastest growing sector is not IT. It is inequality. The astonishing fact is that the assets of the world’s top 3 billionaires are more than the combined wealth of the 600 million people in the least developed countries. The lesson I’ve learned is that conventional economic development will not end poverty because power inequalities actually increase the disparities between those who have and those who do not. Much of what is being called “development” consists of trying to find technical fixes for what are really political problems.

I want to tell you another story about an extraordinary young dalit leader, Martin Macwan. When I met him in Gujarat in 1988, he had been working with an aid agency. He quickly discovered their project did NOT include women or dalits. So he began organizing them to claim their share of development. A few months later, when Martin was away, upper caste men murdered his 4 coworkers – and no one would file a case. The village elite were willing to give charity to the poor but would not permit any activity that might reduce their own power. The Holdeen India Program supported Martin to start an organization called Navsarjan or new beginnings. Their strategy: “Educate, Organize, Struggle”. Martin went from village to village identifying potential dalit leaders, especially women. He educated them about their legal rights. Most important, he taught them how to organize until they were strong enough to demand those rights.

I’ll give one example. Dalit women who are manual scavengers are forced to clean excrement from latrines, sometimes with their bare hands, for 1 rupee per collection. When Martin told the women that manual scavenging is against the law, they replied they

were born to do this work, and that if they didn't the upper castes would beat, even kill them. Besides, they would have no other job. Martin changed the women's mindset. He convinced the women they had the power because without them the village would stink. Navsarjan organized the women into unions. They each gave 1 rupee a month to a strike fund. The Holdeen India Program contributed the rest. It took 2 years for the women to gain confidence and strength. The women went on strike, the villages stank. The government provided other jobs to the women – not great jobs but better than handling feces – and their daughters will never do scavenging.

Now Navsarjan works in 3000 villages and Martin led a national campaign for dalit rights. He won the Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award and was featured on 60 Minutes and National Geographic. Manjula, a dalit woman who Martin trained, now leads Navsarjan and Martin has started a new Center to educate Dalit children and organizers.

So what do I do and what is the Holdeen India Program's role in this struggle? We work with people who are excluded, exploited, even enslaved because of their gender, caste, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. We've learned that the main cause of poverty and injustice is the unequal distribution of power and resources in all spheres: family, work, education, government. We recognize real social change requires both political will and policy change from the "top" and public pressure from the "bottom". In the absence of the former, it is essential that the most marginalized increase their organized strength in order to challenge these systemic inequalities that keep the poor poor. Therefore instead of investing in projects, we search for and support leaders and groups who inspire and build the power of the poorest so they can make the decisions that affect their lives, especially how resources are used. Gandhi asks us to recall the face of the poorest and weakest person and to ask if the steps we contemplate will be of any use to her. Will it restore her to control over her own life and destiny? Gandhi said him but.... We see our role as offering whatever support our partners require to gain control over their own lives and claim their democratic rights and fair share of development. Our partners have used our support to build peoples organizations and movements, and to take on difficult issues and political problems such as bonded and child labor, gender and caste discrimination, trafficking, corruption, and especially the almost complete absence of resources among poor women.

So after 17 years what of Deuben? She has become a union organizer. She now gets minimum wage, which she keeps for herself. Her daughters are going to school; one is becoming an organizer. Deuben makes many decisions for the family, and is recognized as a leader in the community. Her women's group will not permit any family abuse and has brought cases against employers for violence against women and dalits. Most important, Deuben feels confident and powerful and she is not afraid of anyone – her husband, father in law, landlord, police.

I love happy endings but how do we help create them for the millions of Deubens around the world. Though we and Deuben come from different backgrounds, as women we share many common experiences, sensibilities and truths. We are excluded and oppressed in every society. However, the most important truth is that if we join together,

we can take charge, create our own lives, become anything we choose: mathematicians, scientists and leaders. Gandhi said that if only the women of Asia come together they will dazzle the world. Deuben is dazzling. I have been privileged to be among dazzling women and as we become organized – 100s of millions of us – we are lighting up the world.

Thank you.