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**Country: France**

**Volunteering period: Sept. 2018 – August 2019**



### **Final Impression, July 2019**

I had the amazing chance to come to Jodhpur as a volunteer for Sambhali Trust for one year. I came here with the French civic service and via the French NGO Eurasia Net. This year passed really too fast for me and I can't believe that I am now writing my final report. I am everything except ready to say good bye to the people I met here and to this amazing country. I have so much to share with you, that I don't know by where I should start but I will try to be clear and short.

My year of volunteering was not my first time in India so I cannot say that I had a big cultural shock but when I came the first time in India 2 years ago, everything was new and amazing for me. India is so different of what we know that it is like reborn and have to learn everything again. It is full of discoveries and new feelings. I will never forget my first day in India, I actually spent whole day repeating "It's incredible". The streets full of people, cars, tuk-tuks, cows and dogs, the noise which never stop, the new smells, the colours everywhere, the kindness of people and also their curiosity about us, ... everything will always remain in my memories.

When I came to Jodhpur, I was really excited and emotional to be back in India. I was waiting to come back from the day I left, one year earlier. I knew that this time it will be different because the first time I came as a student for an internship and stayed for the whole month in the university. Even if after the internship, I spent 10 days travelling, I did not really have time to discover Indian culture. The little glimpse of this country I had, has turned me up more than I can say. That is why I promised myself to come back, one day, and to really take the time to live here, get to know the culture and work as a volunteer to help people. For this reason, I decided to do a tattoo on me, a symbol I saw everywhere in india, it was my promise to come back as soon as possible. I did the mistake to do this tattoo on my foot, a place not respectful for the Indian culture. And that was a proof again of how important it is to get to know the culture before. I could not wait more than one year before coming as I was missing India too much, so I kept my promise much faster than I thought I will.

When I arrived in Durag Niwas guest house, I directly felt at home. Everybody was really kind and helpful. When I starting my volunteering, we were only four volunteers, Jude and Bianca who arrived two weeks before Lisa and me. During the first week, we get to know more about the trust and the life in the guest house, we visited the different projects with Lisa and started to visit the city like the amazing mehrangarh fort and the clock tower. The first empowerment centre we visited was the one I stayed the whole year even this time I did not know. I remember how I liked to meet these women and tried to communicate with them mixing English, hindi and hand movements. They were really welcoming and I directly loved them. In the next days, we visited other centres and one of the boarding home. All projects were really interesting, I really enjoyed it. During the first week, we went to a temple to assist to Ganesh's festival. The streets of Jodhpur were full of people, it was amazing. We also went to see a Bollywood movie with Govind and he cooked Indian food for us. The first week really allowed us to start to discover Indian culture but also to feel well in the guest house and I am really glad for that. After the first week, with Lisa, we started to work during morning at Laadli empowerment centre and afternoon, to do some administrative work.

### **Pre-lunch, Laadli EC:**

I had the chance to stay in the same centre for my whole 11 months. In the centre, we were teaching English and maths to women from 15 to 45 years old. We had three classes (beginners, medium and advanced). Our first classes were not so easy because some of our students were not able to talk English at all but we were together with Lisa so we get used to it quite fast. We started to learn a little hindi and that really helped us for the communication with our students. Moreover, the Indian teachers in our centre were really helpful when our students could not understand us or reciprocal. We enjoyed specially to try to find different ways to teach them. Indeed, especially for the beginners, we could stay a really long time on the same subject and sometimes that can be frustrating. So, it is nice to try to teach them with new methods, through games for example, and not always ask them to write the alphabet again and again.

Teaching to these women taught me to be patient and to understand that for them it is hard to learn when some of them never went to school before. I, particularly, enjoyed to do workshops about general knowledge on the Wednesdays. The best was to talk about subjects as Women rights with our students and that everyone shared their ideas. During my stay in the centre, I get to know them and they started to trust me and to share about their personal stories sometimes. When we were doing work-

shops about some subjects as women's rights or dowry, they were sharing some stories I even never could imagine and that I will never forget. I know that sometimes for them it is complicated to stay focus a long time on a same subject especially during workshops so in this optic with Lisa we decided to try the most often possible to alternate between proper general knowledge workshops and manual workshops.

One day, we did a workshop on two days about women's rights. The first day we did a PowerPoint presentation and the second day we asked them to make teams, pick one of the subjects we already chosen as domestic violence, dowry or child marriage and to make a poster. The results of the posters were awesome and I was so proud to see how my students were imaginative and confident.

During my year of volunteering, I stayed with the same students for six months and after that, the year-course was finish for them so I had new students for the next other five months. When my first batch of students left, I was really sad even if I continued to see them sometimes when they were coming to say hello in the centre. But Finally, I met my new students and it is always really crazy how relationships are so more intense in India. Just few days after meeting them, I was already so close to them and finally happy to meet even more incredible women and to be able to help more of them.

What Sambhali offers to these women is amazing, they come here for one year and learn how to sew, embroidery and some skills in English, maths and Hindi. Of course, sometimes, it is a little frustrating because you would like to teach them so much more but after you have to realise again that it is already a lot. Some of them never went to school before and it is an amazing chance they have to learn in the centre. That is really changing their lives! Some of my students really improved their English's skills a lot during the year but some are still learning the alphabet but it is fine. The skills in sewing they got are allowing them to get a little money every month. And their English's skills, even for the ones who are very beginners, are still very important for them. But for me, the self-confidence is one of the most important things they are learning in Sambhali and I really can say that during my year in India, with both batches of students, I saw them changing a lot and that is something I am very happy about. I am very proud of all of them and all the progress they did and I will never forget them!

### **Post-lunch, Admin work:**

During afternoon, I was working in the office doing some administrative work. It is very important for the trust to have every year volunteers coming to help them. So, try to find more volunteers was one of my tasks as well as to help the future French volunteers in their visa's procedures or to answer to their questions. Another of my tasks was to try to find more funds for Sambhali with funds campaigns on internet or by applying to some foundations. As an admin volunteer, I had many different tasks to do and instead of what I thought at the beginning, I enjoyed to learn to manage new things I never did before. I, especially, liked to explain to the guests or tourism's groups about the trust. I will not give too many details about my admin work because I did many different things but it was also very interesting and it is important for the trust to have some help in administration from the volunteers because as Govind always says "The foreign volunteers are the open door on the western countries" and that is how we also can be useful.

### **About Sambhali Trust:**

I have no words to express how much I admire Sambhali and Govind's work. I am very proud to had been a part of that. Every day, I spent here were amazing and I always had been impressed by the work of the association. Especially, during events or manifestations of Sambhali I felt as a part of a very important sisterhood and that is the best feeling in the world. For me, one of the most amazing things is that this association had been created by an Indian Rajput man for the women and for that I will always respect you Govind. What you created is just incredible. The whole Sambhali's team is also incredible. Some of them are formers students of the centres and that is so nice to see how much they progressed from the beginning. They all do a very nice work and I know it will continue like that for a long time.

### **About India:**

During my year in India, I also had some holidays and during this time I could visit India and a lot of wonderful places. I know that a lot of people in Europe are scared when we talk about India because they look no further than what the media tell us but it is really different of what you can imagine. Of course, there is somethings you will see you would wish to have not and somethings you would like to change but for that you need time. And it is with NGO such as Sambhali that thigs can change but that takes time. If you are not too scared to look further than the first image we can

have, you will discover an incredible country full of languages, cultures, religions, festivals, colours, smells, beautiful places but moreover awesome people. I know that what I will say seems to be a cliché but it is the truth: You cannot understand India without coming here to see by yourself. And honestly, I think that even a whole life time in India would not be enough for us, foreigners, to understand everything. I fell in love with this country and I only can recommend to people around me to come and see by themselves. In India there is only two possibilities: or you hate it or you really love it!

### **About the guest house:**

After this year, I will leave with a lot of gain of experience, open-minded, and memories I will never forget. But that is not the most important thing I won this year! I will leave India with a whole new family and that I never expected it before coming! Staying one year far from your country, your friends and family when you are only twenty years old is not so easy. But we are never alone in the guest house. There are many volunteers who are living the same experience than you and with who you can share your feelings, but when you stay one year you will see the most of them coming and leaving while you are still here and that is sometimes very complicated to always have to say good bye. But when you stay one year in the guest house it become your house and you learn to know the people there such as Govind's family and friends and the staff of the guest house. And all this amazing people became my family. I will never forget all the good moments spent with them and I know I will come back as soon as possible to meet them again. Say good bye to them will be really hard but I know I will see them again soon! Thank you to everybody for this amazing year, I love you all so much!