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So Finding the right words to sum up all impressions of my time in India is not easy. Although I have been staying with Sambhali for almost a whole year, there are still so much more things I would like to discover about this fascinating country. I know that my experiences are just a very small part in the whole picture of India but I am happy to share my personal experiences with you. However, my advice for everyone is to come here and experience India and the work with Sambhali yourself. No words can describe sufficiently how India sounds, smells, tastes, looks and feels like. India has so many different faces and it is an intense country, full of contrasts. There are the big cities, always busy and never sleeping, modern and open-minded. And there are the villages, quiet and very traditional. You can see people without any property sleeping on the pavement in front of expensive apartments and hotels. There is the penetrative smell of burning rubbish combined with the pleasant smell of spicy curries; the taste of sweet chai and hot street food. India unites all the different landscapes from snow-covered mountains in North-India to desert in Rajasthan, to the sea in the South.

It took me some time to get used to this country that is so different from Germany in many ways. One thing that I am sometimes still struggling with is the fact that Indians treat white people different because of their skin colour. As soon as you leave the guest house, people start staring at you, you have to pay more for almost everything and I cannot count the number of times I have been asked the questions “Which country, mam?” and “One selfie, please?” during the last year.

But the students in the Sambhali projects behave differently. They always made me feel like one of them. They met so many volunteers already that it is normal for them to be in contact with people from all over the world.

Listening to my students’ explanations showed me that the cast system is still very present in many people's mind although it does not exist anymore according to the Indian law. On the one hand, realizing that women and girls are still suffering from old traditions kept alive by their families and that there is so few that I can do to help them out, sometimes made teaching feel useless. On the other hand, there are also many situations which encouraged me to continue with the work. I had to understand and accept that people will not break with their traditional convictions overnight but that change takes generations and happens slowly.

I have been working in two projects: Brothers for Sisters Empowerment Centre in the morning and the Boarding Home in the afternoon. The two projects themselves, my work there as well as my relation to the students were very different but I loved them both.

In the empowerment centre, I have been teaching English and Maths to women and girls aged between twelve and 38 years old. My classes consisted of one to twelve students from whom I could learn at least as many things as they have learnt from me. The women and girls have always been so motivated to learn that I took much pleasure in teaching them. During this year, I have seen many students coming to this centre and leaving it again. I am grateful that I had the chance to meet each of them and to be their teacher and friend.

In the Boarding Home, I have been working with 22 girls aged from six to 15 years old. After helping a third-grader and two seventh-graders with their English homework every day, the volunteers organized an afternoon-program for the girls. We read stories and played theatre, listened to music and danced, played outdoor-games and did many workshops. These girls became my little sisters and I will never forget the amazing time we spent together.

If you decide to work with Sambhali, please, try to stay as long as possible to help the Trust providing continuity in its projects. A long-term volunteer-service will not only bring advantages for Sambhali but also for you. You will gain a deeper insight into the culture, understand the work in the projects better and become close friends with your students. The work with the women and girls in the centres is extremely rewarding. Not every day is easy, but every day is worth the new experiences.

It is weird how time passed by in the last year. On the one hand, it feels like I have always been living here and my first day in India seems to be so far away. On the other hand, time flies and I still cannot believe that I will leave Sambhali in a few weeks already. For me personally, the last year has been the most valuable part of my life. I am glad that I chose to leave my home to come to India and I would definitely make this decision again. I have learnt to appreciate how privileged I am with all the different possibilities in my life compared to the majority of people living here and in many other countries of the world.