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Final Impression, July 2016

So here we are, after 11 incredible months, I have to say Goodbye. Goodbye to Sambhali, Goodbye to my lovely students and Goodbye to all my fellow volunteers with whom I share some of my most unforgettable memories with. I would like to say Goodbye with this quote from Unknown I recently read and completely agree with: „A voluntary year is not just one year in a life, it is a whole life in one year.“

I can't imagine any other year in my life so far that has made me go through such many emotions, adventures and learning experiences. Not all of them were just positive, but I won't regret any single day, because they all added up to this breathtaking experience. There were these days when I was thinking about giving up, just packing all my things and fly back home. But what always kept me going were my students. No matter how upset I was, as soon as arriving in my centres I always felt happy and relaxed. And that's why my biggest Thank you definitely goes to my students – to all the inspiring women and girls of Jodhpur Empowerment Centre and to all the energetic and refreshing children of Sambhali Sambhal.

My pre-lunch job was teaching the Medium-Beginners Group of Jodhpur Empowerment Centre, a centre which is located in the guest house where all of us volunteers used to live. So all I had to do, was walk up the stairs and be welcomed by a lot of cheerful smiles. Throughout my year at Sambhali I was teaching two different groups: The first one consisted of 8 teenage girls, who made being their teacher so easy and joyful for me – there was not even one single day without jokes and laughing. Some of these girls shared their stories with me – and I am so thankful that they gave me the opportunity to get real insight of how living as an Indian girl in this traditional culture is. Even though some of their stories made me cry, I really appreciate that my girls shared them with me and thus helped me to get a full image. Unfortunately almost all of them had to leave the Centre by the end of 2015. It made me truly upset and frustrated to lose these girls, who gave me the best start imaginable here at Sambhali Trust. I really hope they will do well in life and that they could gain something from being Sambhali participants – even if it's just more confidence and the will to change lives for their own future daughters.

Since March 2016 my new Medium-Beginners Group has formed – 6 girls and women this time. They probably couldn't be more different compared to my first bunch of girls, but they are as lovely and memorable. All of them are so eager to learn and

warmed up my heart. Some of them are older than me, something I didn't have to deal with in my first group. But this turned out to be no problem at all, in contrast it was so interesting and thoughts-stimulating for me to hear some of them speaking about their husbands, children and their life as Indian wives. In my last months I also started teaching the Advanced class, a group of ladies with husbands and children. Some of them are Sambhali participants for quite a long time now and I really hope that with time, more and more Sambhali students turn out like they are. This group is confident enough to share thoughts and ideas, something many Indian women are to shy for. I especially enjoyed the Workshops at Jodhpur Empowerment Centre, as I always longed for the discussions in the end to hear the women's opinions on topics like arranged marriage, women's health and women's rights. I have to admit that my own attitude towards a lot of things has changed influenced by these women. They not only showed me that it does not need a lot to be happy, they also made me re-think some of our western values.

Now looking back on the past 11 months, I can't even say who has learnt the most: My students or I. But one thing for sure: I have gained a lot of insights that will change me forever. And not to forget: A big thank you to the two Indian teachers Divya and Anju – working together with you was a pleasure!

To start working at my second project Sambhali Sambhal really was the best decision I've ever made. Being located in the temple of a slum and teaching the children of the rag picker's community, this project is so different from my morning one and I enjoyed having the chance to contribute to such different facilities.

I started working at Sambhal in October as one of the first volunteers as this centre just started being supported by Sambhali, and it didn't take me long to start loving being there. It is located in an area not far away from the clocktower and the entrance is just a narrow street between two houses on the road.

Every day we walked through this narrow street to get to the temple and it is purely heart-warming to have all the children and their families along this way, saying “Jessica-Mam” and try to touch your hands. Already after some weeks it felt so familiar and welcoming to enter the community's living place. I will never forget walking on these street with all the accommodations on both sides, women sitting outside cooking food, and children playing. As said before the centre is located in a temple and divided up into three floors. I was teaching the advanced class at the top floor. All of my students were attending government schools and additionally came to the centre in the afternoons. My students were mostly boys and between 11 and 16 years old. Teaching children is so different from teaching women and it really took me a lot energy to keep their interest. But it also made so much fun and not seldom made my day. They sometimes drove me crazy with their jokes and uncontrollable energy, but at the same time this is also what I loved so much about spending time with them. They are full of ideas and they really are the funniest, cutest and coolest kids I've ever met! We had so much fun together and leaving them behind really makes me devas-

tated... Every single one of them has his or her own personality and I am so glad that all of them were part of my group, and just made the class the way it was. I couldn't imagine any better class! And I also have to say I admire the Indian teachers there for all their work they do within their community!

Next to being a teacher in my two centres, I also was Sambhali Trust's volunteer coordinator from August 2015 to July 2016. To be honest, in the beginning I didn't really even think about what this exactly means. It was a position that changed me in so many ways... I had the opportunity to meet a lot of inspiring and friendly volunteers and talk with them about their stay at the NGO, explaining them the rules and try to find the appropriate projects for them. I am grateful for having met all these other volunteers and I really hope I could help them having a good start at Sambhali. Nevertheless I have to say it wasn't always easy. There were a lot of situations I felt overburden with in the beginning and it took me some time to get used to it and to grow with it. Being the bearer of news and being the one asked from all sides for everything can be really energy-consuming and annoying. And when western volunteers struggled with the rules of the NGO and crushed with Indian culture, it was sometimes particularly difficult for me to stand in between. I can retrace the importance of acting in a certain way for the sake of the NGO's reputation but I see that there are points we as Westerners can easily offend with. I was sometimes frustrated and thinking I was far too young for that, but I also grew with every situation I had to deal with. Being volunteer coordinator made me more self-confident and determined in my thoughts. I don't know if I would do it again, but I also don't regret it as it made me the way I am now.

Another big thank you belongs to all the staff of the Durag Niwas Guesthouse. The cook and the kitchen boys are particularly friendly and do so much for us. And also the cleaning couple was smiling whenever you met them. All the people in the guest house were so welcoming and made the accommodation feel a little bit more like home. And I should not forget mentioning all the other volunteers I met during this year. If you are a longterm volunteer at Sambhali Trust you see so many people coming and going and I definitely met some of the most inspiring, friendliest, funniest and maybe even craziest people from all over the world here.

I stopped counting how often I had to say goodbye to other volunteers but I am thankful for everyone I met. Without all the other volunteers around me with whom I could drink chai, exchange thoughts, spend evenings on the rooftop, go out for dinner or just simply have fun; volunteering at Sambhali would not have been the same!

And now last but not least I want to thank Govind for establishing this NGO that helps so many people in need. He had the passion to start this whole organisation and thus gave the chance of education to so many women, girls and children.