

Name: Roxanne Naeschen (via Volunta)
Country: Germany
Volunteering period: August 2017 – July 2018



Final Impression, July 2018

Since my Volunteering year at Sambhali Trust Empowerment Center Setrawa is I was working for Sambhali for one year with another volunteer. We both were sent by the Germany Red Cross organization Volunta. I still remember my first impressions of Jodhpur and Durag Niwas, horns and cows everywhere, flower necklaces at the Guesthouse, a beautiful welcome, family and house. At first, it all did not feel real. Sometimes it feels like it was yesterday. Now my year is over, just like from one second to the other and I can't realize it. It feels impossible to say goodbye to all the people and work I got used to.

In the first days it was all about getting to know India, Jodhpur, Sambhali and our surrounding a little bit. We went out for our first Rajasthani Thali in a traditional restaurant (I didn't like it that much then as I love it now!), visited the beautiful Mehrangarh Fort, went shopping for our first salwar suits, celebrated our first Indian festival in the Guesthouse with the whole family (Lord Krishna's birthday) and watched our first Bollywood movie. Those days were full of new and exciting things.

In the next three weeks I was working in the Sambhali office for administration work and at the Primary Education Centre of the muslimic Abhaya centre in the afternoons. Sometimes it was of course a little bit difficult to teach three classes with so many children, especially after only a few days in a new country with a completely different language. But after a few days I got used to it more and more and was happy to be creative when it came to plan my English and Maths lessons and workshops. The teachers at the centre were so helpful and open which made it impossible to not feel welcomed over there. Back then I did not know that my whole year would make me feel like that!

In the beginning of September Jana, the other Volunta volunteer, and I had to change our projects so I had to say goodbye to all those kind children and teachers. Even after a few weeks it felt very weird but we closed that chapter with a little bit of Rajasthani music and dancing. This is always the best way to do it and even everything here. Since then, I worked at the Shakti Empowerment Centre in the mornings and at the Laadli Girls Home in the afternoons.

Pre-lunch, Shakti EC: Throughout my 11 months at Shakti there were many changes concerning teachers and students so I got to know many women. Shakti is located a

little bit outside Jodhpur's city centre and it took some time to get there in the Sambhali vans. But most of the time I enjoyed the long drives to see Jodhpur and to already meet some of my students when we picked them up on our way. I spent three hours at the centre which was especially in the beginning a little bit difficult as all students practiced their dance for Sambhali's 10th anniversary and because my students and classes changed after new teachers came in November. It was often a little bit messy but after some time you have to realize that this is just the way it is. I am so lucky and happy that I could stay at that one project until the end. Some women, girls and I have been together for more than half a year now and we are a good team. Because of that it was also so easy for every new student to come and be a part of it. We all just got really used to each other, they knew that I would be at the centre when they arrive, ready with a smile and I was only waiting for them to greet me with a traditional "ram ram sa" or a "good morning" of which they are really proud of when they know how to say it. As my centre is in a more rural area, most of my students never have been to school. Many of them were in my English beginners class called "Lotus"; they were often the most motivated ones. For them it was sometimes even more difficult as they neither know how to write in English or Hindi. But they were so happy to get to know some useful English phrases and to learn things like the alphabet or simple vocabulary. My main class until the last few months was the advanced English class "Sunflower". The girls and women mostly went to school or learned a little bit of English because of their children. Our lessons were full of grammar, reading short stories and useful things for daily conversations and situations. In the end, we concentrated more on talking to each other and asking questions. I made them think about their lives, feelings and families more and they loved to tell more about themselves. Especially because they realized that they became more self-confident to talk in English than before. Those were the moments when I knew that this past year changed something. Of course some of my advanced girls know more about English tenses and so on now but to be honest, most of them still need more time and practice. But that is totally okay, a thing which I sometimes nearly forgot. Those are girls, young and middle-aged women who come to a centre, alone, without their husbands, and mostly without any English skills. Some of them don't even have the support of their mother-in-laws. They learn how to cut, stitch and sew, skills in Hindi and English. They have to start from the beginning, learn a completely new alphabet from people who usually only know this one. I can't express how proud I am of my Shakti and in general all Sambhali students. We often tend to forget it. Now, when it all comes to an end, it is difficult to leave them, the teachers and just the familiarity with all.

Post-lunch, Laadli Girls Home: I never had a sister in my life, not until I was sent to the Laadli Girls Home. It newly opened last April after the big success of the still running Sheerni Girls Home nearby. Again, more than 20 young girls from the villages, mostly Setrawa, got the chance for a better education and life in Jodhpur. Throughout the year I often was the only volunteer at the Boarding Home but luckily I worked really close with the tutor and housemother. When I arrived at the home every day, the girls just finished their lunch after school in the morning and were ready for

homework and tuition. Usually, they were all motivated which made me very proud and the work often more easy than difficult. Because we got so close to each other, the atmosphere was great and we enjoyed to be together. The Boarding Home will probably, and hopefully, run for more years and with maybe more long term volunteers but I am happy that I was their first one. As we were a really good team and they listened to me and trusted me, I could establish some kind of rules to remember. Before their first Christmas at the Girls Home when they were so excited for small gifts (two pictures for everybody for their homes), I said that it will only happen when they follow the rule “no cheating, no hitting, no fighting”. They still say it and always remember each other. All girls gave me so much in the past months. They brought so much joy into my life, trust and fun. True sisterhood. All I hope is that I could give them something as well.

About Sambhali Trust: Sambhali does an amazing job. Govind founded it just out of nothing and look at it now. The centres, the teachers/staff who are a great team, the women and girls who have something for their own with their lessons and work at the centres. They can create something and be a part of a strong community. Next to that, the Boarding Homes are maybe one of the best and powerful things of Sambhali. Sometimes I was just looking at the girls and thinking about how strong, brave, intelligent but also how lucky they are. Even though they of course miss their homes and families a lot they know the value of their opportunity in the city and don't stop to work hard. They got a big chance. Thank you, Govind and the whole team, continue with your great work. I am proud that I am a part of it. I know that you have many new ideas so all the best for the future.

About India: As we were here for one year we had a few opportunities to see more of the country, its people, nature, cultures and more. We went to some places in the North and South but I loved our weekend trips to cities in Rajasthan the most. There are many wonderful parts to discover, new cultures and languages again everywhere. The country is so diverse and colourful. When you live here for such a long time as a foreigner you can't ignore the culture around you. We learned a little bit of Hindi and Rajasthani dances which I know I will miss a lot. Next to that, there are of course things you wish would not exist but it all can't change over night, it takes some time. With the work Sambhali and other NGOs do we move forward in the right direction but the change has to happen in the people's minds.

Life at Durag Niwas: Not only is the Guesthouse a beautiful place but the family and staff are the most powerful aspect of it. It is a combination of a guest family and your own place. Jana and I had our room and still the typical Indian family lifestyle. It is also nice to have the opportunity to be together with so many volunteers from all over the world. We did not count how many new people we welcomed and said goodbye to, it is crazy but can also become a little bit annoying. At those moments you have to learn to do what is best for you. We spent a lot of time at our home so we got very close to all the people living there. The family and staff helped us with the Indian culture and practicing our Hindi/Marwari, were ready for jokes and made

us happy with their Indian and continental food. With Govind and Mukta's great children, Hirnakshi and Ayush, we got another sister and brother. I came with one brother in Germany and leave this place, my home, with a whole second family. Thank you to everybody, especially to Govind, the Sambhali team, Mukta and the whole family at the Guesthouse, Monica and all boys, my students and girls, all teachers, Jana, my family at home and Volunta. The past year changed me a lot and it was definitely the best year of my life so far.

