

US Gandhian collector, Mallya in deal to set up foundation for poor

James Otis, US-based collector of Mahatma Gandhi's belongings, has struck a deal with Indian liquor baron Vijay Mallya to set up a foundation to raise money for the poor and promote non-violence.

Mallya had bought a few of Mahatma Gandhi's personal belongings owned by Otis for \$1.8 million in a controversial auction in New York in March, but Otis who had withdrawn the items from sale at the last minute, had threatened to block their transfer to India.

'We made a deal with Mallya,' Otis told IANS on phone from New York. 'We will be making an exciting announcement about the great work that Mallya is planning to do along with our work - the non-violence work.'

'We are very fortunate to work with a fine gentleman like Mallya,' he said declining to give details of the proposed foundation.

Otis said from the sale of Mahatma Gandhi's iconic round eyeglasses and other personal belongings - pocket watch, sandals, eyeglasses, bowl and plate - he had received a cheque of \$944,000 from New York's Antiquorum Auctioneers. Of this \$450,000 went into federal taxes.

Of the rest he had already donated \$350,000 to three institutions promoting the cause of non-violence with \$250,000 going to Albert Einstein Institution dedicated to advancing the study and use of strategic non-violent action in conflicts throughout the world.

\$50,000 has been donated to Los Angeles based Office Of Americas, dedicated to furthering the cause of international justice and peace through broad based educational programmes.

Another \$50,000 has been given to Dr. Lester R. Kurtz, a professor of sociology and Asian studies at the University of Texas and a Gandhian scholar who has written widely on peace and conflict, non-violence, and the arms race.

Otis said he had 'many many more items belonging to Gandhi, including hundreds of his letters.' And he was wondering what to do with them in view of the controversy created by the auction.

Asked whether he would donate the items to Navjivan Trust, Otis said he preferred to raise money for the poor and forward social movements. 'Gandhi would have preferred that rather than just give it to a trust,' he said. 'I will follow the Gandhian path.'

In the Gandhian spirit, he had given away his own possessions and did not to buy any more things, he said describing it as one of things the auction had taught him.

Otis said he planned to visit six Middle East countries next month to promote 'Gandhi' film in Arabic on TV and theatres as there is still a lot of misunderstanding about Gandhi.

In August, he plans to undertake a tour from North of India to the South to learn more about India's poor and apologise for any hurt feelings he may have caused by the auction.

Arun Kumar (© IANS / India eNews)