

## Saffronart's Passages to India Auction 2024 Achieves Global Price Records for Antiquarian Books and Collectibles

- ***Les Hindous: Ou Description de Leurs Moeurs, Coutumes et Ceremonies [Rothschild Collection]* by François Balthazar Solvyns sold for Rs 1.14 crores (USD 137,349), nearly 3 times its higher estimate, setting a world record for the highest price achieved for the book at auction**
- **The first edition of the Constitution of India drafted by Dr BR Ambedkar sold for INR 48 lakhs (USD 57,831), more than double its higher estimate. Highest price achieved for the first edition of the Constitution of India at an Indian auction**
- **The first printed edition of *The Bhagvat-Geeta*, translated by Charles Wilkins, from 1785 sold for INR 19.20 lakhs (USD 23,133), nearly four times its lower estimate**
- **Several top-performing lots by Thomas and William Daniell, Robert Montgomery Martin, Captain Robert Smith, A S G Butler, James Baille Fraser, Emery Kelen, surpassed their higher estimate**

**Mumbai, 29th July 2024:** Saffronart's **Passages to India Auction 2024: A Journey Through Rare Books, Prints, Maps, Photographs, and Letters** concluded on **24-26 July** with **97% lots sold**, achieving a **total sales value of INR 6.47 crores (USD 779,711)**. The online auction offered buyers the rare opportunity to acquire collectibles on India encompassing a wide range of subjects—history, art, literature, colour prints, photography and cartography—of significant provenance and in exceptional condition for their age. The sale witnessed enthusiastic and competitive bidding globally, with several lots surpassing their pre-sale estimates.

The leading lot of the auction, ***Les Hindous: Ou Description de Leurs Moeurs, Coutumes et Ceremonies [Rothschild Collection]* by François Balthazar Solvyns ([lot 93](#))** sold for **INR 1.14 crores (USD 137,349)**, nearly three times its higher estimate, achieving a world record for the highest price achieved for the book at auction. It is also the highest price achieved for an antiquarian book by an Indian auction house. The book comes from the personal library of Baron de Rothschild and has a compilation of four volumes with texts in French and English as well as intricate coloured plates depicting ethnographic details of society in Calcutta in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The sale also featured the **first edition of the Constitution of India drafted by Dr BR Ambedkar ([lot 91](#))**, which sold for **INR 48 lakhs (USD 57,831)**, more than double its higher estimate. It is the highest price achieved for the first edition of the Constitution of India at an Indian auction. The lot is one of only 1,000 copies, rarely found in private hands or in public view. It has printed signatures of the

framers of the Constitution, most of whom are regarded as the founders of the Republic of India; calligraphy by Prem Behari Narain Raizada; and was illuminated by Nandalal Bose and other artists of Santiniketan with illustrations representing different artistic styles from the subcontinent.

***Oriental Scenery. One Hundred and Fifty Views of the Architecture, Antiquities and Landscape Scenery of Hindoostan* by Thomas and William Daniell (1816) (lot 92)** sold for **INR 31.20 lakhs (USD 37,590)**, exceeding its higher estimate. Featuring six series in a single volume, the work comprises 144 hand-coloured aquatints of views from India, including architecture, cityscapes, and sublime landscapes. It is among the most extensive documentation of the subcontinent of its kind and found patrons throughout Britain as well as in Calcutta and Madras.

**The first printed edition of *The Bhagvat-Geeta*, translated by Charles Wilkins, from 1785 (lot 1)** sold for **INR 19.20 lakhs (USD 23,133)**, nearly four times its lower estimate. This English translation is the editio princeps (first printed) edition of the Gita, coming almost 20 years before any written version in an Indian language. This book proved to be a major influence on Romantic literature and on European perception of Hindu philosophy.

Other highlights from the sale that surpassed their higher estimate include **Robert Montgomery Martin's book on British India (lot 3)**, which sold for **INR 13.20 lakhs (USD 15,904)**. The book is an exceptional set featuring an exhaustive account of the British Empire during the reign of Queen Victoria. It was initially published in 1834 and subsequently revised and expanded upon over a twenty-year period. An antiquarian book titled ***Asiatic Costumes* by Captain Robert Smith from 1828 (lot 12)** sold for **INR 10.80 lakhs (USD 13,012)**. The plates in this book are rare, depicting a full range of Indian trades and society as well as two Burmese subjects. A **first-edition copy of A S G Butler's *The Architecture of Sir Edwin Lutyens* from 1950 (lot 51)** sold for **INR 14.40 lakhs (USD 17,349)**. The three-volume set is an essential and authoritative resource in the study of Sir Edwin Lutyens' enduring impact on architecture. An ***Exquisite Collection of Calcutta Prints* by James Baille Fraser [Set of 17]' (lot 90)** sold for **INR 22.80 lakhs (USD 27,470)** and includes three views of the Government House in the collection, all of which were captured from the eastern side. **Emery Kelen's *Indian Round Table Conference* from 1930 (lot 88)** sold for **INR 14.40 lakhs (USD 17,349)**. The work contains 52 loose hand-coloured lithographic caricatures of the conference participants, including Indian leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, as well as British officials such as Winston Churchill and Lord Irwin.

**Minal Vazirani, Saffronart President and Co-Founder** said, *"The success of our Passages to India auction paints a compelling picture of the rapidly growing market for collectibles. With several lots surpassing their pre-sales estimates, the sale underscores the diversified interests of the South Asian collector. Besides their aesthetics, each lot holds immense historical value as a documentation of India's vast heritage. The value of several lots was also enhanced by their impeccable provenance and personal histories—the leading lot by Solvyns, for example, came from the library of Baron de*

*Rothschild. The first edition of the Constitution of India was another significant addition to the catalogue for its deep emotional resonance as a marker of an independent India and the values it stands for. We were delighted to have both first-time buyers and seasoned collectors engage in very competitive bidding, as the auction offered an opportunity to acquire rare and unique works, across antiquarian books, prints, photographs, and maps.”*

An analysis of the [Passages to India Auction](#) can be viewed at [saffronart.com](http://saffronart.com)

## ABOUT SAFFRONART

Founded in 2000 by Minal and Dinesh Vazirani, Saffronart is a leading international auction house, and India’s most reputed, with over three hundred auctions to its credit. Its flagship gallery is in Mumbai, with offices in New Delhi, London, and New York. At the forefront of selling Indian art, Saffronart has held online and live auctions, exhibitions, and Dialogues in Art, working with collectors, gallerists, and artists to develop a strong market for art and aesthetics. Its focus is to bring transparency to the auction process and provide easy access and information to collectors around the world. Saffronart’s services go beyond auctions to include private sales, appraisals, and valuations for clients. Saffronart has set several global benchmarks for online auctions and was the subject of a case study at Harvard Business School in 2005.

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