

From Kaka Kalelkar and Sarojini Nanavati

9 Sept
1958

9 September 1958
New Delhi, India

On 27 June, B. Tartt Bell, executive secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, wrote King about the impending U.S. visit of Kaka Kalelkar, a member of India's House of Parliament and, in Bell's words, "one of those at the very core of the leadership of the revolutionary non-violent independence movement" in India.¹ Bell asked King to arrange a visit in Montgomery for Kalelkar, who was "particularly anxious" to learn more about developments in the South.² Kalelkar served as a guest speaker at the MIA mass meeting on 4 August and while in Montgomery discussed with King the possibility of a visit to India.³

My dear Dr. King,

We left America on the 19th of August and reached Delhi on the 25th. Our House of Parliament opened on the 17th. So I was late only by a week.

Recently I had a talk with my colleague—the President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations.⁴ I told him of the wonderful time we had with you at Montgomery and added that you would be coming to India with your wife, on a short visit, and I had, on behalf of the I.C.C.R., invited you to continue your stay in our country and see various parts of India and meet the many people who worked for the freedom of India under the guidance of Mahatma Gandhi.⁵ He was glad I gave you the invitation and said that the I.C.C.R. would be responsible for the expenses of yourself and your wife {in India} {here in India} ~~for~~ as suggested by me.

But when will you find the leisure to come to India? The papers say (7th September) that you refused to pay a fine and preferred to go to jail for two weeks but that a segregationist paid your fine {!!} and that you are free. This is interesting news. So the non-violent fight has begun again. I have no doubt about the ultimate success of the cause of the coloured people. The American Constitution is

1. Dattatraya Balkrishna Kakasaheb Kalelkar (1885–?) earned his B.A (1902) from Fergusson College in Poona. Kalelkar joined the faculty at Santiniketan in 1914, and the following year met Mohandas Gandhi. He became a committed follower and companion of Gandhi from 1915 until the Mahatma's assassination in 1948. Kalelkar served as vice-chancellor (1928–1935) of the Gujarat Vidyapeeth, a national university founded by Gandhi. In 1935, Gandhi gave Kalelkar the task of popularizing Hindi as the national language, a project on which he worked for more than thirty years. He also was a member of India's Parliament (1952–1964) and served as editor of the Hindu weekly *Mangal Prabhat*. The author of more than thirty books, Kalelkar was an expert on the caste system in India.

2. Responding for King on 15 July, Hilda Proctor wrote Bell that King would be "most happy" to accommodate Kalelkar in Montgomery.

3. In a 30 November letter to American Society of Friends associates, Henry and Mary Cushing Niles wrote of Kalelkar's meeting with the Kings: "Hearing the exchange of ideals and practice between the venerable, saintly Hindu and the influential young Negro preacher and his gifted singer-wife was indeed inspiring."

4. Kalelkar refers to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, India's minister of education and the president of the ICCR Kalelkar served as vice president of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, which initiated his visit to the United States.

5. King met with Kalelkar briefly during his 1959 trip to India (King to Henry Niles, 7 April 1959).

16 Sept on your side, and so are justice and the spirit of the Times with you. Need I add
1958 that the prayers of millions of my country folk are also on your side?

I have been talking to our people here of the joy and privilege we had of being the guest of Coretta and yourself, and we tell them that both of you are pious people after the heart of Mahatma Gandhi.

I am eagerly waiting to receive the copy of your book which you said would be out in September.

You must somehow find time to come to India.

Kindly remember us to your gifted wife and the kiddies and to all our friends there and tell old Mrs. Sterrs that we remember her.⁶

Brotherly yours,

[*signed*]

Kaka Kalelkar

{Dear Brother,}

My love to dear Coretta and yourself. I think of you {and the children} very often.

[*signed*] Saroj⁷

TALS. MLKP-MBU: Box 26.

6. While in Montgomery Kalelkar may have stayed with Eloise Sterrs, who ran a boarding house next door to the Kings on South Jackson Street.

7. Sarojini Nanavati was Kalelkar's personal assistant.