

# Why Bombay was special for Mahatma Gandhi?

**A new 332-page book — with rare photos, letters and speeches — sheds light on the matter**

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**H**undred and two years ago in 1915, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi arrived in Bombay at 7.30 am by the SS Arabia from South Africa via London. Later he stayed in the residence of Revashanker Jhaveri in Santacruz. July 9, 1946 was the last visit to Bombay by the Mahatma for an AICC Working Committee meeting.

The 31 years from 1919 onwards when Gandhi initiated the first nationwide satyagraha are celebrated in a book *Gandhi in Bombay (Towards Swaraj)*. The 332-page book — with 50 rare photographs, letters and speeches — has been researched and compiled by Usha Thakkar and Sandhya Mehta.

The book launch, quite appropriately, was on January 9, 2017 (the anniversary of Gandhi's arrival in Mumbai from South Africa) at Mani Bhavan. The institution on Laburnum Road is in walking distance to the venue of the birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and the Quit India movement in 1942. In addition it is renowned for two reasons: Gandhi's home in Mumbai and the fact that the two-storied mansion belonged to Revashanker Jhaveri.

During the launch, Satish Sahney of Nehru Centre mentioned how with "the exception of three national movements", Gandhi launched all his nationwide struggles from Bombay, a city which had an enormous impact on the Indian nation. Later, Naresh Fernandes of



(Left to Right): Satish Sahney, Sandhya Mehta, Prof Bhikhu Parekh, Usha Thakkar and Naresh Fernandes

**“Bombay is beautiful. She enabled India to keep her promise**

—M K Gandhi, Young India, 6 July 1921

Scroll shared anecdotes about Gandhi's meetings with Polish survivors of World War II and Jazz musicians; all in Bombay.

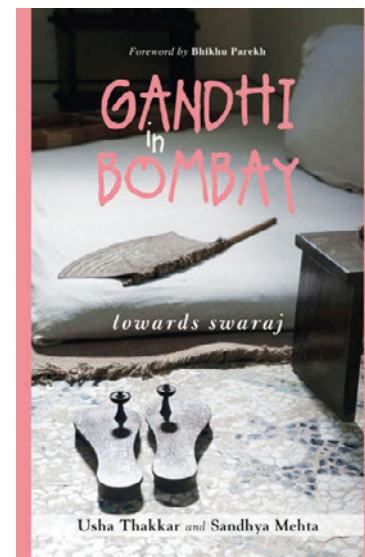
After which Prof Bhikhu Parekh, a political theorist and Gandhi scholar who has penned a foreword for the book, addressed the packed

gathering. He said, “In *Gandhi in Bombay*, the main argument which Mahatma Gandhi makes again and again is that the Bombay is beautiful, and Bombay is generous and great.” The reason, why Bombay has this tradition and other Indian cities don't, is, according to Gandhi, “because of the presence of the Parsis which was not only considerable but also decisive.”

Parekh pointed out, the majority Hindus do not have a tradition of philanthropy, at least philanthropy of the public kind. During his stay in Bombay, Gandhi grasped this.

That the Parsis had created a highly developed civic culture not found in other Indian cities. This civic culture was marked by a willingness to contribute generously to worthwhile public causes. And from the Tilak Swaraj Fund to the Deenbandhu Memorial Fund, the city never “disappointed Gandhi.”

This, according to Parekh, became Gandhi's lifelong mantra. To take the core culture of his Hindu forefathers and strength its values and rectify its deficiencies. “Gandhi used those years in Bombay to reorient his moral focus



and concentrate on transforming Indian culture.”

## From Mohandas to Mahatma

Over the years, Gandhi has been turned into a saint. “Then, he could do no wrong. Nowadays, he could do no right.” Parkeh felt it is important to understand why that is so?

Parekh has a word of caution in these day-and-age of identity politics, wherein “the mistake of those who turn Gandhi into a saint invite the contempt of those who do not want to say anything good about him.”

Parekh stated, Gandhi had many limitations, like all of us. “The question is what did he do about those limitations.”

The story of Bombay, Parekh stated, is how Mohandas began with “all the prejudices of an ordinary Indian — and over time he began to realise he had to modify his views; and became more and more progressive.”

Parekh stated, “This city shaped this man”. This book — *Gandhi in Bombay* — is also the story of a small, teenage, frightened man who was terrified to stand before a magistrate in a small court. How such a man through sheer willpower transforms himself.

That story of self transformation, and Gandhi's association with Bombay from the time he visited this city on July 5, 1891 en route to London to become a lawyer provides insights into how a city can change the course of a man and indeed it's a nation's history.