

Sanat Mehta in the Freedom Movement: The Silent Soldier of Independence

In his youth, playing a significant role in key events leading to independence and the integration of princely states. He demonstrated leadership by mobilizing people and taking direct action against British rule. This early commitment as a freedom fighter profoundly shaped the principled and ideological foundation of his lifelong public service.

Here are the key aspects of his involvement:

- **Quit India Movement (1942):** As a college student, Sanat Mehta joined the Quit India Movement, a nationwide call for British withdrawal from India. He was involved in nationalist activities in Bhavnagar alongside other freedom fighters and was jailed for his participation. His activities included organizing protests, public meetings (sabhas), and even unconventional acts of protest like disrupting government services by cutting electric lines.
- **Arzi Hukumat Movement (1947):** This was a major contribution by Mehta. After India's independence, when the Nawab of Junagadh expressed his desire to accede to Pakistan against the wishes of the majority of the population, Sanat Mehta, along with leaders like Ratubhai Adani, spearheaded the Arzi Hukumat (provisional government) movement. This movement was crucial in ensuring Junagadh's integration into India. It involved forming a government-in-exile and applying pressure, including an economic boycott, on the Nawab's administration.
- **Imprisonment:** Due to his active involvement in the freedom struggle, Sanat Mehta was jailed multiple times by the British authorities.

IN A Youth Awakened by the Nation's Cry: Born in 1925, Sanat Mehta came of age during one of the most tumultuous and inspiring periods in Indian history. As a young student, he was deeply influenced by the ethos of **Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent resistance**, the **Quit India Movement of 1942**, and the growing nationwide call for **Swaraj** (self-rule).

- Though still a teenager, he participated in local protests and underground activities during the **Quit India Movement**.
- He was known to circulate pamphlets, support civil disobedience efforts, and assist political prisoners and freedom fighters in his region.

Guided by Gandhian and Socialist Ideals

The freedom movement didn't just ignite his patriotism—it introduced him to the **moral framework of activism**. Mehta embraced:

- **Gandhian values** of non-violence, truth, and service to the poor.
- **Socialist philosophy** that emphasized equality, justice, and redistribution of resources.

These twin influences shaped his lifelong commitment to **anti-authoritarianism, people's rights,** and **grassroots democracy**.

Freedom as a Beginning, Not an End

For Sanat Mehta, **15 August 1947** was not the end of struggle—it was the beginning of a new one. True to his belief that political independence must be followed by **economic and social freedom**, he transitioned seamlessly into post-independence activism.

- He worked to **liberate the rural poor from poverty and injustice**, just as India had been liberated from colonial rule.
 - He saw **freedom not as a flag to be waved**, but as a **responsibility to be fulfilled**—in every village, every law, and every act of public service.
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Legacy of a Freedom Fighter Turned Nation Builder

Though he may not have held guns or led armies, **Sanat Mehta's role in India's freedom struggle was no less heroic**. His battle was one of **ideals over apathy, service over selfishness, and truth over tyranny**.

Today, he stands not just as a political leader—but as a **living bridge between India's struggle for freedom and its ongoing journey toward justice and equality**.

A Journey



A Voice for Freedom

As a young student leader, Sanat Mehta joined the Indian freedom movement with courage and conviction. His activism shaped his lifelong mission to serve the nation with compassion and integrity.



Sanat Mehta's Role in the Mahagujarat Movement (1956-1960):

Sanat Mehta was a significant and prominent leader in the Mahagujarat movement, which successfully campaigned for the creation of a separate state of Gujarat for Gujarati-speaking people from the bilingual Bombay State. This movement primarily took place between 1956 and 1960.

- **Key Leadership:** He was recognized as one of the crucial leaders of the Mahagujarat Andolan. The initial text you provided referred to him as its "last living leader."
- **Close Associate of Indulal Yagnik:** Mehta worked in close association with Indulal Yagnik, who is widely regarded as the foremost leader and the public face of the Mahagujarat movement. Mehta was a core member of Yagnik's team.
- **Active Participation and Mobilization:** He was actively involved in the agitations, protests, and public mobilization efforts undertaken by the Mahagujarat Janata Parishad, the primary organization spearheading the demand for a separate state. At the relatively young age of 31 in 1956, he played an energetic role in the movement's activities.
- **Socialist Influence:** As a dedicated socialist, Mehta's ideology would have influenced his approach to the movement, likely emphasizing the rights and aspirations of the common people in the demand for a new state.

Regarding the year 1961:

The state of Gujarat was officially formed on **May 1, 1960**. By 1961, the primary objective of the Mahagujarat movement—the establishment of Gujarat—had been achieved. Consequently, the Mahagujarat Janata Parishad was dissolved as its main goal was accomplished.

Therefore, in 1961, Sanat Mehta's direct involvement in the *struggle phase* of the Mahagujarat movement would have concluded. His activities thereafter would have transitioned towards shaping the new state of Gujarat, where he continued his long public and political career, eventually becoming a Member of Parliament and the state's finance minister.

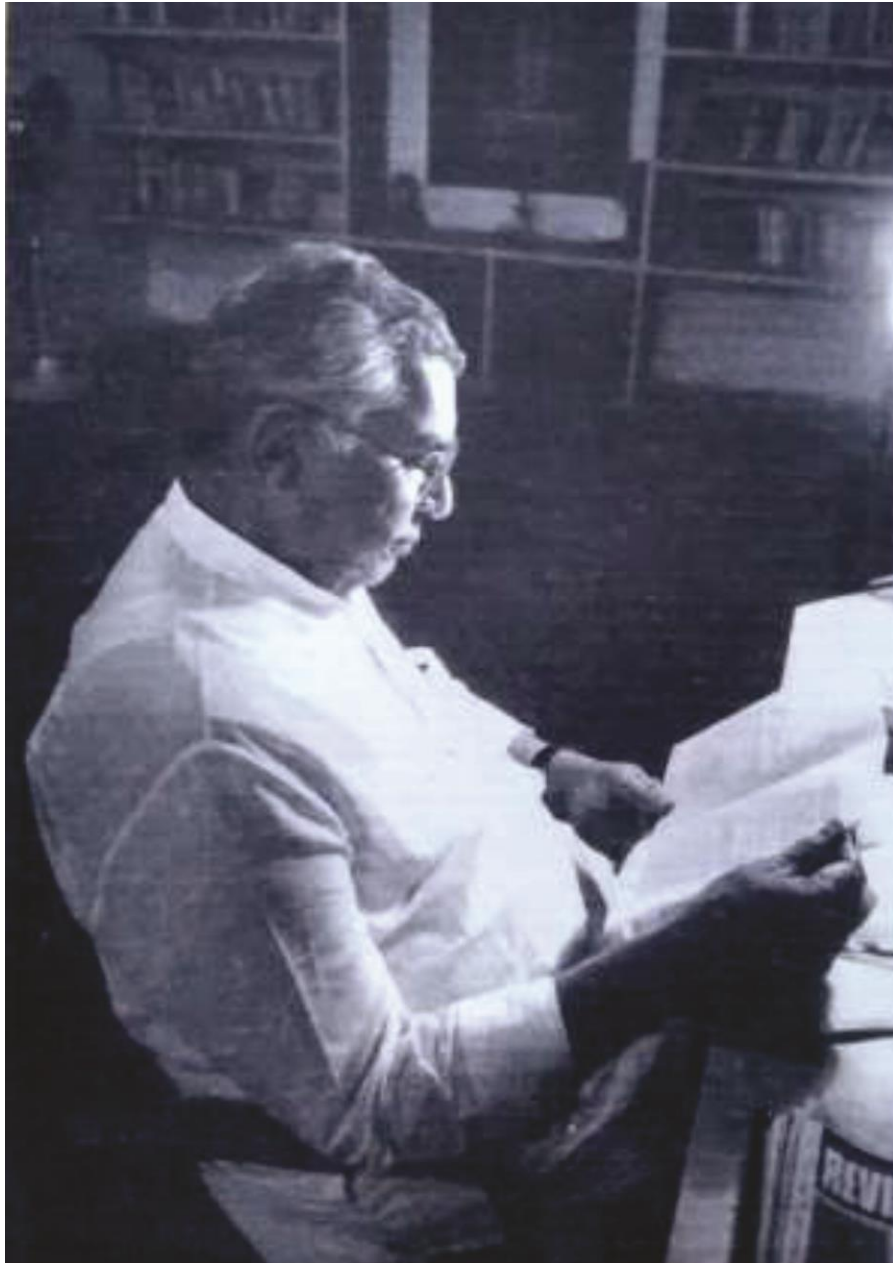
Link : [Establishment Day of Gujarat & Maharashtra – MoDe India](#)

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Shaping Gujarat's Future

A key architect of Gujarat's statehood, Shri Mehta helped define the policy landscape for the newly formed state — placing equity, education, and rural empowerment at its core.



Sanat Mehta in Indian Politics: The Torchbearer of Ethical Leadership

In the often turbulent and transactional world of Indian politics, **Sanat Mehta** emerged as a rare figure—a **man of principle over power, policy over populism, and service over self-interest**. His political career was rooted in deep ideological conviction and unwavering dedication to the people, particularly the marginalized and voiceless.

Entry into Politics: A Mission, Not an Ambition

Sanat Mehta's entry into politics was a natural extension of his activism during the freedom movement. After India gained independence, he dedicated himself to building a just and equitable society—**not from the top down, but from the grassroots up**.

- He joined the **Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP)**, aligning with leaders like **Ram Manohar Lohia** and **Jayaprakash Narayan**.
 - His ideology was clear: **socialism with human dignity**, where the state is a tool of justice, not exploitation.
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Core Political Beliefs and Philosophy

Sanat Mehta's politics revolved around a few key pillars:

- **Socialism:** Not merely as a theory, but as a way of life—focused on wealth distribution, social equality, and state responsibility.
 - **Democratic Values:** He was a fierce defender of constitutional democracy, civil liberties, and decentralization of power.
 - **Rural Development:** Mehta believed that true progress must begin in the villages—with education, employment, and empowerment.
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Leadership Roles and Contributions

Over the decades, Sanat Mehta held several important positions that allowed him to **translate his vision into policy**:

Legislator and Lawmaker

- Served multiple terms in the **Gujarat Legislative Assembly**, where he was known for his sharp intellect, clean image, and fearless voice.
- Championed laws related to land reform, labor rights, and transparency in governance.

Finance Minister of Gujarat

- As **Finance Minister**, he approached the economy not just as a system of numbers but as a moral obligation to the people.
- Focused on **fiscal discipline**, **social spending**, and curbing corruption in public finances.

Leader of the Opposition

- A constructive critic, he held the ruling governments accountable while maintaining the dignity of democratic debate.
- Never played divisive politics—his opposition was always issue-based, never personal.

Chairman of Gujarat Electricity Board (GEB)

- Reformed electricity distribution with an emphasis on **rural electrification**, **efficiency**, and **public accountability**.
- Championed infrastructure as a right, not a privilege.

Emergency Era and the JP Movement

During the **Emergency (1975-1977)**—when India’s democratic institutions were under siege—Sanat Mehta stood firm with **Jayaprakash Narayan’s Total Revolution Movement**.

- He **risked arrest and persecution** to oppose the autocratic rule of Indira Gandhi.
- He worked underground, coordinated with activists, and **reaffirmed his lifelong belief that democracy is non-negotiable**.

Legacy in Indian Politics

Sanat Mehta’s political legacy is **one of integrity, courage, and compassion**. While many chased headlines, he focused on **policies that quietly changed lives**.

- **He refused to compromise his principles**, even if it meant standing alone.
- He became a **moral compass** for many young politicians who admired his simplicity, humility, and unwavering sense of justice.

"He wasn't a politician who visited villages during elections—he was the one who stayed back when the cameras left."

Conclusion: A Statesman, Not a Politician

Sanat Mehta never treated politics as a career—it was a **calling**. He walked the long road of public service with **clean hands, a clear conscience, and an open heart**. In an era where political discourse often loses sight of values, **his life reminds us what politics is truly meant to be: a sacred duty to serve the people.**

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Champion of the Marginalized

From salt workers in Kharaghoda to fishermen in Kutch, Sanat Mehta stood shoulder to shoulder with the unheard — fighting for rights, dignity, and access to healthcare and justice.



Sanat Mehta Role in the Sardar Sarovar Project

Sanat Mehta, a seasoned politician and former Finance Minister of Gujarat, played a multifaceted and significant role in the Sardar Sarovar Project, evolving from a staunch proponent and key negotiator to a concerned voice for the project-affected people.

His involvement spanned several crucial phases of the project:

- **Early Advocacy and Securing Support:** Mehta was a key figure in advocating for the Narmada dam project. He actively participated in efforts to secure crucial financial backing, including from the World Bank, which was vital in the project's initial stages.
- **Leadership Role:** He served as the **Chairman of Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd. (SSNNL)**, the primary body responsible for the implementation of the project. In this capacity, he was directly involved in the decision-making and execution processes.
- **Negotiating for Gujarat's Interests:** As a prominent political leader from Gujarat, Mehta tirelessly worked to protect and promote the state's interests concerning water sharing and project implementation.
- **Championing the Cause of Oustees:** Later in his engagement with the project, Sanat Mehta became increasingly vocal about the rights and the plight of the people displaced by the dam (the oustees). He expressed concerns regarding their rehabilitation and resettlement, advocating for fair treatment and fulfillment of promises made to them. Reports indicate he was critical of the Gujarat government's handling of the oustees' issues at times, even after having championed the project itself.
- **Concern for Project Completion and Benefits:** Mehta consistently emphasized the importance of completing the project to ensure that its intended benefits, particularly irrigation and drinking water, reached the people of Gujarat, especially in drought-prone areas like Saurashtra and Kutch.

In essence, Sanat Mehta's role was characterized by a long-term commitment to the Sardar Sarovar Project, initially as a key driver and implementer, and later as a voice of conscience urging attention to the social justice aspects of the monumental undertaking. He navigated the complexities of the project, from its financial foundations to its human impact. Sanat Mehta, a veteran Indian politician and social activist from Gujarat, played a key administrative and leadership role in the Sardar Sarovar Project, primarily as the **first Chairman of the Sardar Sarovar Narmada Nigam Ltd. (SSNNL)**. He was appointed to this position in 1990. SSNNL is the primary body responsible for the implementation and execution of the massive Sardar Sarovar Project.

Key aspects of his role include:

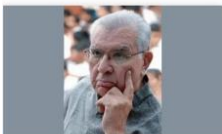
- **Leadership of SSNNL:** As the inaugural chairman, Mehta was at the helm of the organization tasked with the monumental work of constructing and managing the dam, its canal network, and associated infrastructure.
- **Financial Management and Mobilization:** During his tenure in the early 1990s (he was noted as chairman in 1993), Mehta was involved in the challenging task of securing funding for the project. This was a period when financial institutions were reportedly

hesitant to fund large irrigation projects. Mehta recounted the necessity of approaching the public to raise funds, such as through Narmada bonds. He also acknowledged that unforeseen delays in the project's construction significantly impacted the initial financial projections.

- **Navigating Challenges and Protests:** Like many figures associated with the Sardar Sarovar Project, Mehta's tenure involved navigating controversies and public pressure. For instance, reports indicate that protest rallies were held against him (as director of Narmada Nigam) and other project officials by groups advocating for specific regional water allocations, such as for the Kutch region. Some accounts suggest these protests led to increased water allocation for irrigation in areas like Kutch.
- **Engagement on Project Issues:** He was also a figure with whom activists and those scrutinizing the project engaged. For example, social activist Jyotibhai Desai is noted to have had interactions with Mehta during his leadership of the SSP, discussing concerns related to the Narmada struggle, including allegations of corruption and other project-related issues.

Sanat Mehta's role was therefore critical in the initial, formative years of SSNNL's efforts to bring the long-conceived Sardar Sarovar Project to fruition, dealing with both the operational and financial challenges, as well as public and activist scrutiny.

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A Legacy of Quiet Strength

Shri Mehta lived simply, served quietly, and believed that dignity should always accompany service. His vision lives on through the Sanat Mehta Charitable Trust's grassroots efforts.

