

Dr MS Gill: A man of many parts

A bureaucrat, who served in the undivided Punjab, Gill was known for his sharp intellect and plain speak.

By: **Express News Service**

Chandigarh | Updated: October 15, 2023 20:24 IST



Gill was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for his contribution as the Chief Election Commissioner and the "Nishan-e-Khalsa" on the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa. (Express Archive Photo)

Dr. Manohar Singh Gill, a distinguished figure in the annals of Punjab bureaucracy and politics, passed away in a Delhi hospital on Sunday.

A bureaucrat, who served in the undivided Punjab, Gill was known for his sharp intellect and plain speak.

His journey in bureaucracy commenced in 1958 and he retired as the Chief Election Commissioner of India, a position he held from 1996 to 2001. It was during his tenure that the EC introduced Electronic Voting Machines.



MS Gill, PC Alexander, Atal Behari Vajpayee and Vilasrao Deshmukh.(Express Archive Photo)

After retirement, Gill joined the [Indian National Congress](#) and represented Punjab in the [Rajya Sabha](#) from 2004 to 2016, marking two successful terms as a member of the upper house. During this period, he held the portfolios of Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports and Minister of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Gill was a prolific writer and scholar, delving into topics close to his heart, particularly those related to Punjab. His work “Agriculture Cooperatives: A Case Study of Punjab,” which originated during his study leave in Cambridge in 1974-75, showcased his deep understanding of agricultural issues.

Gill was an advocate of a fair resolution to the contentious river water disputes that have long plagued the region. He believed that dialogue and not the Supreme Court held the key to the resolution of the contentious SYL issue.

Gill, who served in the undivided Punjab from 1958, never stopped lamenting what he would call the “second division” of the state in 1966. Linking the water dispute with the trifurcation of the state, Dr Gill once told [The Indian Express](#), “The division was unfair with many Punjabi-speaking areas going to Haryana, and our riparian state was given a raw deal and forced to share its river waters.”

He would also bemoan the “loss” of [Chandigarh](#), the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana. “Punjab’s capital is under the control of the Centre. A Station House Officer (SHO) in Chandigarh can charge Punjab Chief Minister legally, as he is only a tenant there. So is the Haryana Chief Minister,” he would rage.



Dr Gill's interests also extended to the Himalayas, and he served as the President emeritus of the Himalayan Club. (Express Archive Photo)

Gill also felt very strongly about the degradation of Punjab's soil and water due to the chemical intensive agriculture. "We have overused our soil to fill the granaries of the country and look at the fallout ," he would often say.

His views on capital punishment were well known and he openly defied Congress while opposing the death penalty awarded to Balwant Singh Rajoana for the assassination of Chief Minister Beant Singh in 1995. It is a "barbarian concept" that should be abolished immediately through a legislation, he felt.

Dr Gill's interests also extended to the Himalayas, and he served as the President emeritus of the Himalayan Club. His stint as Deputy Commissioner of Lahaul and Spiti and his mountaineering training at HMI Darjeeling underscored his abiding passion for the mountains. His books, "Himalayan Wonder: Travels in Lahaul and Spiti" and "Tales from the Hills: Lahaul's Enduring Myths and Legends," offered insights into his experiences in the remote and captivating landscapes of Himachal.

Gill was awarded the Padma Vibhushan for his contribution as the Chief Election Commissioner and the "Nishan-e-Khalsa" on the 300th anniversary of the Khalsa.