

Bhagat Singh visits Jallianwala Bagh on 14th April to collect blood soaked soil from the site

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A young Sikh boy, just on the verge of adolescence, sporting a loosely tied turban, wearing a crumpled shirt and *pyjamas*, stared at the stinking, blood-soaked open space with tell-tale signs of inhuman massacre that had taken place there just the previous day. He had a distant, forlorn and a deeply thoughtful look in his eyes. From the pocket of his *pyjamas*, he took out a small glass bottle which he had brought to carry the blood-soaked soil back with him. He tried digging, but the soil had hardened, despite the fact the crust was somewhat moist with blood of hundreds of innocent people. He picked up a sharp-edged brick and dug out the soil. Having filled the bottle, he stared at it. His eyes welled up with unshed tears. With unsure steps, he left the spot.

That morning, the young Sikh boy, Bhagat Singh, had left his home near Lahore for school, but instead of going to attend his classes in D.A.V. School, he headed for the railway station and boarded the first available train to Amritsar. He had heard about the horrifying massacre of the 13th of April that took place at *Jallianwala Bagh*. Hundreds of Lahorites who were in Amritsar on the fateful *Baisakhi* day came back with bone-chilling accounts of the killing of innocent people in cold-blood. That night he could not sleep. The spectre of the blood bath at Amritsar haunted him throughout the night. He was restless. The scenario was dark and the echoed with the cries of the hapless victims. What drove him to carry the glass container to bring back the blood soaked soil, is difficult to guess. Perhaps it was something that was sacred to him and that he needed the soil as a painful reminder of the killing of innocent people — the pain that had to be avenged!

He had no difficulty in finding his way to the spot, which had been the venue of many public meetings, where he frequently accompanied his father to attend various conferences, particularly since 1917 when Sardar Kishan Singh had shifted to village 'Khawasrian' on the outskirts of Lahore and set up a farm and dairy there in order to be close to Lahore — the hub of political activities those days. Bhagat Singh often travelled alone from Lahore to the village Banga, Lyallpur, during holidays, when he was in the school hostel.

Upon his return to the house late evening, Bhagat's younger sister ran out to meet him. Indeed the family was worried since the boy had not returned as per his normal routine. An uneasy calm, uncertainty and ominous forebodings hung heavy in the air. His sister had fondly kept aside his share of fruit. The moment her brother entered the house, she rushed in to offer it to him, but instantly she realized that her brother was sad and forlorn. "I cannot eat anything," Bhagat Singh said, "Let me show you something." And he took out the glass container filled with the blood soaked soil. "The Englishmen have slaughtered so many of our brethren." He narrated the horrifying saga, plucked some flower petals and placed them reverentially around the container. This ritual continued for many days.

The young boy had grown up overnight: He had lost his childlike innocence and his carefree adolescence yielded to unexpected maturity.

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Historically, the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh is a watershed in our struggle for freedom. It also proved to be a turning point in the life of young Bhagat Singh. A fire started simmering inside him and he became a committed soldier ready to dedicate his life for the freedom of his beloved country. That he did.
