



Revisiting the Concept of Ahimsā in the Philosophy of Dada Bhagwan

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Abstract

Classical and contemporary Indian philosophy primarily examines epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, and religious frameworks with an ultimate focus on social well-being. This research paper provides a comprehensive analysis of non-violence (ahimsā) as articulated in the spiritual philosophy of Dada Bhagwan. Unlike traditional interpretations that often restrict ahimsā to the avoidance of external physical harm, Dada Bhagwan proposes an inclusive principle encompassing verbal and mental non-violence. He emphasises self-transformation through self-realisation, tranquillity, and mindfulness as the essential foundations for authentic ahimsā. Drawing from Dialogues with Dadaji on Life and Living and Compassionate Living, this study investigates ahimsā as both a transformational spiritual discipline and an ethical framework. For Dada Bhagwan, non-violence begins internally by purifying one's intent (bhava), speech, and thought, which subsequently manifests as external harmony. Consequently, causing harm through judgment or negative thought is viewed as a form of violence that impedes spiritual progress. This paper situates Dada Bhagwan's teachings within the broader context of Jainism, Buddhism, and Vedanta, highlighting his unique emphasis on practical accessibility for contemporary seekers. Ultimately, the study argues that his interpretation of ahimsā offers a transformative path for global peace by fostering spiritual clarity and universal compassion.

Keywords: Akram Vignan, Dada Bhagwan, Non-violence, Spirituality

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Introduction

Shri Ambalal Muljibhai Patel, revered as Dada Bhagwan, was a Gujarati businessman whose external life belied a profound internal quest to understand the nature of human existence and the cosmos. His inquiry was driven not by ascetic ambition or religious dogma, but by a fundamental curiosity regarding the mechanics of life and the root causes of human suffering. *How does life operate? What is the core of who we are? Why do we feel sorrow despite our attempts for happiness?* Such concerns have been universal, yielding substantially satisfactory solutions.

A pivotal moment occurred in 1958 at the Surat Railway Station, where he experienced a permanent spiritual awakening. This realisation involved the total discernment of the “Real Self” (the Pure Soul) from the “relative self” (comprising the body, intellect, ego, and speech). Following this event, he became a mentor, answering the inquiries of spiritual seekers with experiential clarity rather than formal sermons. His teachings, known as *Akram Vignan*, provide a direct path to self-realisation that bypasses traditional ascetic rigours. At the core of his philosophy is the belief that human life is a rare opportunity for inner progress and liberation (*moksha*), which is achieved once the “ignorance” of the “Real Self” is eradicated.

The distinctive feature of Dada Bhagwan is that he rarely delivered formal speeches. He welcomed enquiries from the straightforward, pragmatic to the philosophical, across a vast spectrum of life and reflections on faith, heritage, and the human experience. and answered them with an innate clarity that astounded academics, scientists, and spiritual seekers alike. His teachings were revelations of life-governing truths rather than statements. He never forced belief but welcomed knowledge. His thoughts provided release by assisting people in integrating their inner and outward worlds in a time when stress, worry, uncertainty, and moral disintegration make everyday life difficult. At the core of Dada Bhagwan’s philosophy is the notion that human life is an unparalleled chance for inner progress.

Life is not a random occurrence nor a simply biological phenomenon.; it is a field of learning an arena in which every condition, relationship, or event becomes a lesson directing the person towards perfection and self-realization. Liberation, whether named Nirvana, Moksha, Mukti, or Kaivalya, is not something external to be gained but the inherent condition of the soul once ignorance is eradicated. This realisation formed the basis of *Akram Vignan*, a direct path to self-realisation without traditional ascetic practices.

This conception is very close to traditional Indian philosophical thoughts, where self-realisation is seen as the intrinsic character of Atman (self), once ignorance is dissolved (Radhakrishnan, 1999). Dada Bhagwan emphasised the necessity of a living Gnani Purush (enlightened master), who grants self-realisation through *Gnan Vidhi*, a scientific process of distinguishing the Real from the relative (Bhagwan, 2025). This parallels the concept of *Samyak darshan* (right vision) in Jain philosophy, which serves as the gateway to liberation. This concept operates within the cosmic order where all living beings seek happiness and avoid pain (Johnson, 2009). Dada Bhagwan posits that inflicting misery on others inevitably results in personal suffering - a karmic reciprocity. Therefore, *ahimsā* is not merely a moral vow (*mahavrat*) but a scientific necessity for those seeking lasting peace. This paper explores how his nuanced understanding of non-violence - starting with human interaction and extending to all living species - addresses the moral complexities of the modern world.

Literature Review

The existing literature on Dada Bhagwan primarily originates from spiritual circles, with a significant gap in formal academic and comparative philosophical analysis. This study utilises primary sources, including *Dialogues with Dadaji on Life and Living* and the *Aptavani* series, which detail the “stepless path” to self-realisation. These works redefine *ahimsā* as absolute freedom from the intent to harm.

To provide a rigorous academic framework, this research engages with:

- **Classical Texts:** Radhakrishnan's *Indian Philosophy* (1951) and Dasgupta's surveys provide the historical context for *ahimsā* in Buddhist, Jaina, and Vedantic schools.
- **Comparative Ethics:** The study contrasts Dada Bhagwan's "spontaneous awareness" with Mahatma Gandhi's effort-based ethical discipline (*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*).
- **Contemporary Perspectives:** Peter Singer's utilitarian animal ethics and Arne Naess's "Deep Ecology" are utilised to demonstrate the modern relevance of a holistic, non-violent worldview.

While Jaina philosophy emphasises strict austerities to prevent karmic influx, Dada Bhagwan's approach focuses on the internal purification of intent (*bhava*), making it highly applicable to householders and professionals.

A *Critical Survey of Indian Philosophy* (1964), written by Chandra Dhar Sarma addresses the various aspects of Indian philosophy as a whole. He further clarifies the moral outlook of Indian philosophical thoughts specifically, the Buddhist and Jaina traditions, which emphasise non-violence (*ahimsā*) as an ontological and metaphysical necessity rather than a social resolution.

Surendra Bothra's work entitled as *Jaina's ahimsā: The Science of Peace* (2012) very clearly explains *ahimsā* as a scientific and psychological discipline which is very closely connected with the philosophy of non-violence of Dada Bhagwan.

In "The Story of My Experiments with Truth" (1929), M.K. Gandhi explains the philosophy of *ahimsā*, as well as in *The Essential Gandhi* (2001) and *Hind Swaraj or India Home Role* (1909) positions *non-violence* as an active ethical power which is the guiding principle for personal discipline and social

transformation. Whereas M.K. Gandhi's principle of *ahimsā* highlights the moral and self-restraint, on the other hand Dada Bhagwan's method transcends effort-based ethics portraying *ahimsā* as a spontaneous awareness. This difference provides an expressive proportional width for the research.

A book written by Harvey entitled *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics* (2000) scrutinises sympathy, mindfulness, and *ahimsā* as essentials to moral life. The Buddhist importance of *bhava* is equivalent to the nonviolent philosophy of Dada Bhagwan, which originates in inner intent rather than outward deed, strengthening the philosophical legitimacy of his holistic moral vision.

In the modern era, the notion of *ahimsā* is not limited to only human beings. The well-known ethicist *Peter Singer*, in his book *Practical Ethics* (2011), elaborated and provides such great examples from the utilitarian perspectives for the ethical responsibility of human being towards animals. His farmwork suggests that ethically or morally, humans are not going to involve any kind of violent activities towards non-human beings.

The prominent environmental activist or philosopher Arne Naess is famous for his contributions to ecology. His work *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (1989) enunciate the viewpoint of deep ecology, supporting a consistent vision of life that resonates strongly with the holistic philosophy of Dada Bhagwan, where injury to any being is destruction to the cosmic order itself.

After a very careful and critical study of different existing literature, it is clear that the viewpoints of Dada Bhagwan cover the notions widely. His study pursues to fill the gap by offering a difficult philosophical inquiry into his vision of non-violence as the groundwork of holistic living in the contemporary world.

Research Objectives

This research attempts to explore the practical perspectives of Dada Bhagwan on *ahimsā*, a concept that extends beyond mere physical non-injury to include non-violence in speech and thought. The study further highlights how

the cultivation of true *ahimsā* can lead to self-realisation, inner equanimity, and heightened awareness. Moreover, it seeks to understand non-violence not only as an ethical philosophy but also as a divine spiritual practice.

Materials and Methods

The present study adopts a qualitative and interpretative research approach, as it deals primarily with philosophical concepts rather than empirical data. It is essentially a concept-based inquiry aimed at critically examining the practical dimensions of *ahimsā* in the teachings of Dada Bhagwan. Methodologically, the study employs doctrinal analysis to systematically interpret the philosophical doctrines articulated in his teachings. This is complemented by conceptual analysis, which helps clarify key notions such as non-violence, inner purity, and self-realisation. A comparative framework is also used to situate Dada Bhagwan's views within the broader landscape of Indian philosophy, particularly in relation to Jain philosophy and Advaita Vedānta, thereby providing both contextual depth and critical perspective.

The primary sources for this research consist of the original and translated works of Dada Bhagwan, especially *Dialogue with Dadaji on Life and Living* and *Compassionate Living*. These texts are examined through close reading and interpretative analysis to uncover their philosophical insights on *ahimsā*. Secondary sources include scholarly writings on Indian metaphysics and ethical traditions, which serve to support interpretation, enable comparison, and strengthen the theoretical foundation of the study.

The choice of this methodology is justified on the grounds that philosophical research requires interpretative engagement with texts rather than quantitative measurement. Therefore, the study relies on textual description, critical interpretation, and conceptual evaluation to arrive at meaningful conclusions regarding the ethical and spiritual dimensions of non-violence.

Results and Discussion

Dada Bhagwan, known as the enlightened one, presents an entirely different understanding of non-violence that goes beyond the common concept of nonparticipation from bodily injury. Dadaji asserts that *ahimsā* is the absence of internal violence- the subliminal feelings, ideas, and behaviours that feed misery and strife- rather than only the absence of external aggressiveness. This interpretation of nonviolence paves the way for spiritual emancipation, which involves developing a pure interior condition devoid of ego, attachment, rage, and hatred in addition to avoiding physical damage to others (Dada Bhagwan, 2015).

“No living being should get hurt- such should be an approach of one’s intellect (2/135); Saying something that makes someone feel bad or sad is also considered ‘violence’”. (Kalita. S. 2025)

Dada Bhagwan's fundamental concept of “Self-Realisation,” or the understanding of one's actual nature as the soul, separate from the body, mind, and other influences, forms the basis of the book's main topic. Dada Bhagwan asserts that when a person achieves self-realisation, they view the universe as interrelated and realise that all creatures are manifestations of the same divine energy, transcending the illusion of individuality (Dada Bhagwan, 2015). Since one comprehends that injuring someone is the same as injuring oneself and that doing so compensates the central core of life, this realisation unavoidably leads to a robust intelligence of *ahimsā*.

The disparity Dada Bhagwan draws between bodily and emotive or inner *ahimsā* is among the most remarkable characteristic of his views on non-violence. According to Dadaji, although we may not deliberately harm someone physically, we frequently harbour unpleasant feelings like resentment, jealousy, and anger- all of which are types of violence that may be far more harmful than actual physical harm. For him, these assumed kinds of *ahimsā* or violence leave karmic traces that hinder our divine development and add to the

world's desolation (Jaini, 1998, pp. 134 -138).

“Observing” one's opinion or views and works without affiliation is also emphasised in Dada Bhagwan's teachings. He pushes his pupils to separate from their ego and wants to realise that their own soul; pure, timeless, and unaffected by conditions, is their real spirit. Hence, substituting love, kindness, and sympathy instead of fear, rage, or self-serving requirements is made possible by this vision. Dada Bhagwan believes that as Atman is inherently nonviolent, peaceful and loving, people automatically become an Ahimsak or nonviolent after knowing their true form.

According to Dada Bhagwan, there is a continuous need for self-examination and self-awareness throughout life. For him, *ahimsā* arises naturally when a person realizes their true nature and recognizes their harmony will all living beings. Again, he delivers accommodating guidance on how to escape the bonds of pride, anger, and connection that keep us stuck in a vicious cycle of pain, suffering, and violence. One might nurture a situation of internal *ahimsā* by purifying one's thoughts, deeds, and intentions via practices like “*Samayika*” (a meditation and contemplative practice) and “*Pratikraman*” (a divine practice of repentance and compassion). Dada Bhagwan also presents the ideas of “real” and “relative” views. The real viewpoint arises from knowing the real character of the self and the cosmos, whereas the relative viewpoint deals with the world as it is, with all of its complexity and dualities. According to the real viewpoint, there is no difference between oneself and other people (I and You); all species are interconnected. An unshakeable condition of nonviolence results from this realisation, which also nurtures an inner regard and compassion for all living species.

How Dada Bhagwan treats violence in assembly to “ownership” of the body is one of his philosophy's distinctive contributions. The way that he teaches people is unnatural by the principles of duality; attachment, grief, and fight, when they connect with the body and consider themselves—its owner. One becomes free from these attachments and capable of practicing complete non-violence when they

realise that they are not merely the physical body. Here, Dada Bhagwan declares that understanding that the self is outside the body, independent of its acts, and imaginative by the karmic predicaments transported about by bodily violence is the genuine meaning of *ahimsā*. Dada Bhagwan also explains the importance of appropriate realisation (*Samyak Darshan*), which has the capacity to perceive authenticity without misapprehension or misinterpretation (illusion). One is wedged in the reactive cycles of violence, both internal and external, if they do not have this actual knowledge. Hence, Dada Bhagwan also promotes the expansion of this real knowledge by self-examination, meditation, divine textual study, and a conscious awareness of the world's illusions. Dada Bhagwan also argues that men are unsurprisingly haggard to a life of *ahimsā* when they have real knowledge of their real nature. This is not because they are pushing themselves to act in a peaceful manner rather, it is the natural result of their divine expansion.

Qualities like simplicity and accessibility of Dada Bhagwan's teachings are what make them so beautiful. Irrespective of one's divine experience, he simplifies difficult divine ideas into manageable stages that anybody may follow. His nonviolent views are not limited to the divinely enlightenment; they apply to everyone who aspires to individual peace, harmony, and societal advancement and compassion too. One may increasingly change their life from one of fight and suffering to one of peace, wealth, and happiness by following the teachings of Dada Bhagwan.

The beauty of Dada Bhagwan's teachings lies in their simplicity and accessibility. He presents profound spiritual ideas in a practical and understandable manner, enabling ordinary people to apply them in their daily lives regardless of their level of spiritual experience. His philosophy of non-violence is not confined only to spiritually enlightened individual; rather, it is relevant to all those who seek inner peace, social harmony, compassion and the overall welfare of humanity. By sincerely following his teachings, individuals can gradually transform their lives from conflict and suffering to peace, prosperity and

happiness. In this broader context, Dada Bhagwan's understanding of Ahimsa resonates deeply with the rich intellectual and spiritual traditions of India, particularly Jainism, Buddhism and Vedanta, all of which regard non-violence as central virtue. His teachings may therefore be viewed as a continuation and contemporary reinterpretation of their classical Indian traditions of non-violence (Radhakrishnan. S, 1999, pp. 282-289).

According to the Jain faith, the soul's emancipation depends on avoiding injury to any living creature, whether it be physical, verbal, or mental. It also demands that one be extremely careful in one's actions, words, and thoughts. This all-encompassing approach to nonviolence is also shared by Dada Bhagwan, who emphasises *Bhāva-himsā*, or violence at the level of purpose and inner disposition. However, Dada Bhagwan provides a more flexible and inward-focused spiritual path that allows people to start where they are, without imposing the constraints of formal monasticism or ritual observance, in contrast to the strict austerities and extremely disciplined lifestyle required by traditional Jain practices (Dundas, 2002, pp. 134 -138).

In a more compassionate and psychologically gentle form, his Pratikraman technique, which involves asking for forgiveness through self-reflection and repentance, is a powerful and approachable tool for gradually purifying one's inner self. It closely resembles Jain practices of *Prāyaścitta* (atonement).

Similarly, in Buddhism, the development of compassion (*karuṇā*), correct thought, and mindfulness (*sati*) are all closely related to nonviolence. The Buddha stressed that the primary causes of suffering are mental constructs like hate, wrath, and delusion, and that the only way to achieve nirvana is to put an end to these troubles. According to Dada Bhagwan, the internal violence of negative emotions like pride, attachment, rage, and envy is far more harmful to spiritual development than outward hostility.

The teachings of Dada Bhagwan are grounded on the realisation that the Soul or Self (*Ātman*) is a pure, eternal entity that is different from

the body, mind, and ego. This realisation is more in line with *Vedāntic* ontology than the Buddhist view, which characteristically evades postulating an eternal self and opinions on renunciation as the cessation of pain and suffering through the realisation of transience and non-self (*anattā*). His method, however, is practical and non-sectarian, combining *Vedāntic* spiritual realisation with Buddhist psychological insights to provide a comprehensive knowledge of nonviolence that is both socially useful and internally transformational.

All creatures are expressions of the same ultimate reality (Brahman), according to the *Vedāntic* tradition, especially the *Advaita Vedānta*, which is based on the realisation of non-duality (*advaita*). Since hurting someone would be the same as hurting oneself, this insight inevitably promotes compassion and nonviolence on a universal level. This *Vedāntic* perspective is well aligned with Dada Bhagwan's concept of *Ahimsā*, particularly his teaching that "to hurt any living being is to hurt one's own soul." However, Dada Bhagwan applies these insights to real-world situations, in contrast to orthodox Advaita, which frequently stays limited to abstract philosophical debate (Tiwari, 1983, pp. 60 - 65).

He emphasises that ignorance of the Self is the prime violence and that, once Self-realisation sets in, compassion and non-harming become instinctive rather than moral obligations to be intentionally exercised. Thus, his philosophical approach combines the psychological depth of Buddhism, the moral rigour of Jainism, and the ontological clarity of *Vedānta*, while also giving it a unique pragmatic simplicity and universal relevance (Dada Bhagwan, 2024). The approach of Dada Bhagwan is incredibly experiential, democratic, and inclusive- open to professionals, householders, and people from all religious and cultural backgrounds- in contrast to traditional systems that could mainly focus on text, rituals, or monastic discipline.

Furthermore, teachings of Dada Bhagwan on *Ahimsā* include not only individual development but also social harmony and

world peace. According to him, global peace must be based on personal inside change rather than just political agreements or outward changes. People act in a way that is inherently consistent with nonviolence, empathy, and respect when they acknowledge the divinity in both themselves and others. He contends that the most viable basis for social and spiritual development is this inward revolution. Dada Bhagwan's teachings in this way offer an outline for worldwide synchronisation and the well-being of all people in adding to a philosophy for individual emancipation. While the philosophy of Dada Bhagwan is prejudiced by the thoughtful realisation of Buddhism, Jainism, and *Vedānta*, it is not incomplete by any one of these backgrounds. Dada Bhagwan's mixture of self-realisation, practical compassion, and inner laxative offers a worldwide paradigm of *ahimsā* that is both intensely deep-seated in India's knowledge tradition and strangely applicable to the problems of modern life. Dada Bhagwan also invites people to follow the path of Compassionate Living, where honest non-violence develops a normal appearance of awakened being rather than a mass of restraint. Dadaji's message is forthright yet bottomless, speaking to the essence of mankind (Johnson, 2009).

Conclusion

The present study concludes that the philosophy of Ahimsā that is preached by Dada Bhagwan is a lively and intensely knowledgeable path to divine realisation, ethical behaviour, and inner transformation rather than just a religious reaffirmation of an ancient Indian concept. He reinterprets) ahimsā to exceed the outdated limits of avoiding physical harm. For Dada Bhagwan, the inner spheres of human consciousness, thoughts, feelings, speech, and intentions are where true nonviolence commences. By emphasising internal cleanliness via self-realisation, levelheadedness (samata), and continuous awareness (jagruti), Dada

Bhagwan provides an inclusive and convenient outline for enriching non-violence that is eternal and applicable to all circumstances.

The teachings of Dada Bhagwan acquire more complexity in the context of larger Indian intellectual traditions. His philosophy, like Jainism, places a solid emphasis on eliminating negative ideas and intentions from oneself to cleanse oneself. It highlights kindness and mindfulness as means of attaining inner peace, much like Buddhism. It also accentuates the notion of the Self as the ultimate reality, which is essentially pure and nonviolent, much like Vedanta. Nevertheless, the method of Dada Bhagwan is notable for its truthfulness, straightforwardness, and universal openness.

“Without the kingdom of non-violence, absolute knowledge never dawns. Without non-violence, complete awakening will never come”. (Kalita. S. 2005)

The message of Dada Bhagwan is amazingly applicable now in a world when violence, war, and division are on the rise. Present-day society needs a shift in viewpoint, not only social changes or distant peace accords. For this, Dada Bhagwan provides an applied and enduring path to people and societal harmony by encouraging individuals to examine themselves, notice and purify their thoughts, and live with realisation of the peaceful nature of the soul.

In the last notion of Ahimsā, as reflected in the philosophy of Dada Bhagwan, is a strong principle for anyone chasing world peace, divine cleanliness, and harmony as it cuts across all religious, cultural, and philosophical divides. Dadaji's teachings help as an aide-memoire that sincere change starts within, and that we can only bring about a loving and peaceful world by experiencing an inner metamorphosis. His philosophy of Ahimsā (non-violence), therefore helps as a beacon for humanity, showing the route to a more peaceful and holistic way of living.

“There is no power as nonviolence and no weakness as violence”- (Kalita. S. 2025, Dada Bhagwan: Aptasutra: 588)

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