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The Silent Minority: Autism, Moral Truth, and the Politics of Being Heard in Contemporary India

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Abstract:

Autistic individuals remain largely absent from mainstream philosophical, religious, and political debates in India, despite the fact that their lived experiences directly engage questions of truth, power, dignity, and social responsibility. Discussions of autism in the Indian context are mostly confined to medical or welfare frameworks, leaving little room for philosophical or political reflection. This paper argues that autism should be understood not merely as a clinical category but as a philosophical and political lens that exposes the moral contradictions of contemporary Indian society. By placing autistic modes of communication and perception in connection with classical Indian ideas of satya, modern structures of normalcy and authority, religious practices of belonging, and the digitally saturated culture of Indian youth, this study challenges dominant assumptions about normality, communication, and inclusion. It highlights how autistic clarity and resistance to social performance unsettle a society that publicly values truth yet often prioritizes comfort and conformity over ethical consistency. In an era marked by political polarization, curated identities, and sensory overload, autistic experiences invite a rethinking of what it means to speak honestly, listen ethically, and participate meaningfully in community life. The paper ultimately argues that engaging seriously with autistic perspectives is an ethical necessity, with important implications for how truth, inclusion, and moral responsibility are understood in contemporary India..

Keywords: Autism, Religion, Philosophy, Satya, Culture

1. Introduction

It is widely recognized that India is home to some of the world's most significant philosophical reflections on truth, compassion, and moral duty. Yet one group remains consistently pushed to the margins of these conversations, that is, autistic individuals. Their absence is not accidental. It reflects deeper assumptions about who counts as a moral agent, who gets to participate in social dialogue, and whose way of thinking is worth taking seriously.

At the same time, India's younger generation is navigating a landscape shaped by contradictions:

- a culture that is obsessed with visibility yet anxious about authenticity,
- increasing political engagement but decreasing attention spans,
- louder public debates but weaker listening,
- rising awareness of mental health but limited understanding of neurodiversity.

Autism lays at the intersection of these tensions mentioned above. It offers a radically different perspective, not only in the field of communication but on how people relate to truth, authority, relationships, and community. This paper examines how the autistic experience provides a unique entry point for rethinking truth and power in today's India.

2. Truth and the Autistic Mode of Communication

One of the most striking characteristics of autistic communication is its clarity. Many autistic individuals speak with a level of directness that bypasses the layered social cues most people rely on. This directness is often misread as bluntness or rigidity, but philosophically, it demands attention. [5], [12]

Indian traditions, right from the Vedic emphasis on *ritam* (cosmic truth) to Gandhian experiments with truth, all aimed to treat honesty as a disciplined moral practice rather than a social convenience [6]. Yet modern Indian society often rewards tact, strategic silence, and smooth social behaviour over straightforward truth.

Autistic communication disrupts this structure and it raises uncomfortable questions, such as:

a) Why is honesty punished when society claims to value it?
b) Why do people prefer socially pleasing statements over accurate ones?
c) Is truth still meaningful if it must be softened to be acceptable?

Autistic individuals often refuse the social requirement of packaging truth gently. They may point out inconsistencies, hypocrisies, or illogical routines without hesitation. Instead of interpreting this as moral clarity, society frames it as a deficit and some kind of inability from their side [5].

This reaction reveals a deeper philosophical contradiction, like 'Truth is worshipped in the abstract but rejected when it challenges comfort'.

Autism exposes this contradiction with unusual sharpness.

3. Normalcy, Control, and the Politics of Correction

Ideas of "normal" usually function like invisible laws. They are never written down, never openly debated, yet they shape almost every interaction in Indian society. From childhood onwards, people are trained, sometimes in a gentle manner, and sometimes forcefully, just to behave, speak, and even feel in ways that match majority expectations. Autism exposes this invisible system more clearly than almost any other condition [4]

Autistic individuals are frequently placed under a quiet but constant pressure to "adjust." The word sounds harmless, but it hides a deeper structure of control. Schools ask autistic children to make eye contact even when it causes distress. Families ask them to "behave properly" at functions without understanding sensory overload. Workplaces encourage them to develop "soft skills," a polite phrase that often means "act like everyone else." None of these demands are framed as political, yet they all enforce conformity to a dominant norm.

This is where autism becomes a political lens rather than a mere medical topic. Politics is not only what happens in Parliament, it is the distribution of power in daily life. The power to decide what is "normal" is one of the strongest forms of authority a society holds [9]. When autistic behaviour is seen as something to correct, it reveals who has that authority and who does not. The majority defines the standard; the minority must bend.

What makes this even more significant is that the pressure to conform is often justified as care. Parents, teachers, and therapists genuinely believe they are helping when they try to "fix" behaviours such as hand-flapping, lack of small talk, or a preference for solitude. But the question is rarely asked, like

Fixing for whom?

Is the behaviour harmful, or does it simply make others uncomfortable?

The difference between harm and discomfort is where the philosophical depth lies. Much of what society wants to change about autistic people has nothing to do with their well-being. It has everything to do with maintaining the smooth functioning of social interaction. In other words, society protects its own comfort by demanding that autistic individuals carry the burden of adaptation.

This becomes especially clear when one compares the treatment of autistic differences with the treatment of social norms that young people routinely break today. Let's see for an example, the digital generation openly rejects traditional expectations about dress, career, or relationships. Society negotiates with these changes. But with autism, society does not negotiate, rather it instructs. This difference shows that the problem is not change itself but who is allowed to bring change.

Religious and moral traditions add another layer to this. India's spiritual heritage often speaks of inner truth, non-harm, humility, and compassion. Yet the lived reality contradicts these ideals when autistic individuals are pressured to hide their natural behaviours just to appear acceptable. If compassion is truly valued, then accommodating sensory needs, communication differences, and alternative ways of experiencing the world should be seen as moral duty, not inconvenience.

The connection to truth becomes unavoidable as autistic individuals often follow their internal truth, such as how they feel, how they perceive, what they need, without performing social roles. Society, however, rewards performance over authenticity. This clash shows that the politics of normalcy is also a politics of truth. Those who cannot perform socially polished behaviour are marked as "less capable," even when their honesty and clarity align more closely with the ethical ideals India claims to respect.

Thus, normalcy is not a neutral idea. It is an instrument of power. And autism reveals this by making the invisible visible. The constant correction autistic individuals face is not just therapeutic, it is cultural discipline. It determines who must adjust and who gets to remain as they are. Seen from this angle, the struggle for autistic inclusion is fundamentally a struggle over who gets to define the limits of human difference in contemporary India.

4. Religion, Community, and the Ethics of Belonging

As its already know to all, religious life in India is deeply communal. Festivals, rituals, prayers, and gatherings form the basic backbone of spiritual identity. But these environments can be overwhelming for autistic individuals, crowded spaces, loud sounds, unpredictable movements, and complex social interactions.

Yet Indian religious thought also contains some of the most inclusive moral ideals, such as compassion (*karuna*), non-harm (*ahimsa*), and dignity for all beings [6] The philosophical writings of Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and various Hindu traditions reflect deep sensitivity to suffering and inner truth.

Autism brings a quiet but powerful challenge to religious communities. They help one in questioning their thoughts, such as,

Does people practice compassion only when it fits their own comfort?

Or can one reshape communal spaces to include those who experience the world differently?

The ethical tension becomes clear here as religion preaches universal belonging, but autistic individuals often feel invisible or unwelcome in its physical and social structures. Addressing this mismatch requires not just empathy but a rethinking of what religious community truly means.

5. Digital Youth Culture: Overstimulation, Identity, and Autistic Difference

The sensory and social landscape of today's generation is radically different from even a decade ago. Continuous scrolling, constant notifications, visual clutter, and algorithm-driven content have created an environment of perpetual stimulation. Many young people struggle with focus, sustained attention, and face-to-face communication.

Autistic individuals, on the other hand, often show deep focus, intense interests, and a preference for clarity and routine. These qualities, which are frequently misunderstood, provide a striking counterpoint to the distracted digital culture of today.

Instead of dismissing autistic focus as "obsessive," society could view it as a model of sustained engagement.

Instead of treating sensory sensitivity as weakness, society could question whether its environments are simply too loud, too chaotic, and too overstimulating for everyone.

In this sense, autism becomes a critique of modern life. It shows that the problem is not the autistic mind, it is the overwhelming world built around it.

6. Representation, Voice, and Political Belonging

Political belonging is not only about legal rights, it is about being recognized as a voice that matters. In India, autistic individuals are legally acknowledged under disability bases, yet they remain practically invisible within the country's social and political imagination. Their absence is not just a gap, it is the result of how society decides whose speech counts as legitimate and whose speech is treated as noise, inconvenience, or dependency [4]

Representation begins with voice, and voice begins with listening. The problem is that Indian political and social structures are designed for one dominant communication style, like fluent, quick, socially polished, emotionally predictable, and responsive to unwritten cues. Autistic communication often does not follow this script. Some speak in short, literal phrases. Some use writing rather than speech. Some communicate through movement, gesture, or silence. Instead of learning to understand these modes, institutions respond by sidelining them.

This creates a political paradox, the very group that needs representation the most is the least able to fit into the communication norms required to gain that representation.

Even when autistic individuals do speak, whether verbally or in writing, they are often interpreted through the voices of others. Parents speak for them. NGOs speak for them. Professionals speak about them. Policies are written without their input. Awareness campaigns show images of autism but rarely include autistic people's own perspectives. This pattern turns autistic individuals into objects of policy rather than participants in shaping policy.

It also reflects a deeper political bias in Indian society and is seen through the following ways:

People who communicate differently are treated as though they have nothing to say.

But communication style is not the same as thought, and speech patterns are not the same as intelligence or moral perspective. This confusion reveals a blind spot in Indian political culture, one where social fluency is mistaken for authority.

Digital culture adds another layer. Today's generation communicates heavily through social media, quick exchanges, trending slogans, viral reactions. This environment favours speed and emotional immediacy, leaving almost no space for slow, careful, or alternative styles of expression. Autistic communication, which may be deliberate, precise, or sensory-driven, clashes with the tempo of digital discourse. As a result, autistic voices get drowned out in an environment that rewards noise over nuance. This silence is not passive. It is a form of political exclusion. When public conversations become too fast, too stylized, or too performative, those who cannot match these rhythms are pushed outside the circle of influence. Autistic individuals are not simply under-represented, they are structurally muted.

Yet their perspectives could fundamentally enrich political debate. Their sensitivity to fairness, discomfort with hypocrisy, and preference for clarity over manipulation align closely with democratic values. Their experiences challenge institutions to rethink accessibility not as charity but as a restructuring of power.

Religious communities claim to value humility and political leaders claim to value inclusion such as educational systems claim to value diversity. But these ideals remain unfulfilled when autistic individuals are not invited into decision-making spaces, not as symbols but as contributors.

Representation, in this sense, becomes an ethical test:

Does India want autistic people to be visible, or does it simply want them to be manageable?

If society only accepts difference when it is quiet, compliant, or supervised, then representation becomes performance, not transformation.

A genuinely inclusive India would expand its understanding of communication, slow down its assumptions about competence, and open its political spaces to voices shaped by different neurological realities. The challenge is not whether autistic individuals can participate, but whether society is willing to shift its expectations of what participation looks like.

Representation is not about giving a mic to the loudest. It is about making room for those who have been unheard for too long.

7. Conclusion

Autism, when placed into dialogue with India's religious ideals, philosophical traditions, and contemporary political realities, reveals a set of contradictions that society often prefers to overlook. This paper argued that autistic experiences expose tensions between truth and comfort, inclusion and control, identity and performance; the body of the paper has shown how these tensions play out across communication, normalcy, religious belonging, digital culture, and political representation.

Through the autistic mode of communication, one sees how honesty is celebrated in principle but sidelined when it disrupts social expectations. Through the politics of normalcy, one observes how conformity is framed as care while masking deeper pressures to maintain majority-defined behaviour. Through the lens of religious life, one finds a gap between moral ideals and everyday practice. Through digital youth culture, one discovers how overstimulation and curated identities have made authenticity harder to sustain, even though autistic clarity could offer a counterbalance. And through the question of representation, one confronts the uncomfortable truth that political spaces reward polished speech over genuine perspective, excluding those whose communication does not fit the preferred template.

Taken altogether, these ideas demonstrate that autism is not merely a medical classification but a philosophical and political lens that challenges some of India's strongest assumptions about what it means to be truthful, to belong, to participate, and to be heard. Autistic individuals highlight how society routinely confuses social comfort with moral correctness, performance with communication, and conformity with inclusion. Their experiences reveal the distance between the values India claims to uphold, i.e., compassion, dignity, justice and the structures that shape everyday life.

If India is serious about these ideals, the task is not to "correct" autistic individuals but to correct the environments, norms, and expectations that silence them. Inclusion cannot remain symbolic as it must

reshape how truth is understood, how community is built, and how political voice is recognized. A society that values honesty, fairness, and diversity must learn to listen to those whose truths are expressed differently.

Autism, therefore, is not an exception to be accommodated; it is a reminder of what is possible when difference is treated not as a disruption but as a source of insight. The silent minority has offered its perspective through presence, clarity, and lived experience. The question now is whether contemporary India is prepared to listen and allow that perspective to become part of the moral and political vocabulary of the nation.

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