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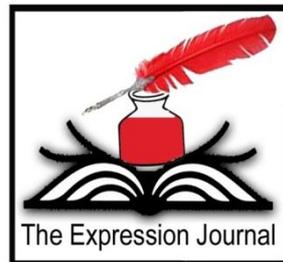
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# The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

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## **“AMALKANTI”: A MISFIT OR A SILENT CRITIQUE OF STANDARDIZATION IN EDUCATION?**

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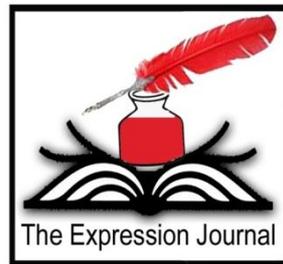
### **Abstract**

Nirendranath Chakraborty’s poem “Amalkanti” beautifully represents the conflict that modern civilisation has enforced on us when we educate ourselves for our careers by developing our skills, not our being. The people who do not fit into such an education policy and strategy are usually left out to live in the marginalised sections of society that can never experience the light of day. Amalkanti wanted to become sunlight, apparently an impossible dream; but it just represents the romantic aspect of Amalkanti which has no place in the world of rationality and logic of our education system. Education should not be just for acquiring skills but also should develop human beings to realise their potential, dreams and wishes. The poem is a harsh reminder of reality, making us fall into the trap of going with the flow of society and not being a misfit. The research paper “Amalkanti: A Misfit or A Silent Critique of Standardization in Education?” aims to look at the poem critically to understand how school lessons are more significant to us than the beauty of life and how those who start enjoying the beauty of life remain outside the development model, and often become subject of our abject sympathy. The poem’s narrator looks at Amalkanti sympathetically, but such sympathy for Amalkanti makes him suffer from more solitude as he is made to feel like a non-achiever. Amalkanti is not a non-achiever; it is just that he does not have the urge to follow the means and ways of the system, which kills the uniqueness of individuals.

### **Keywords**

Amalkanti, Education System, Sunlight, Career Choices, Misfit, Standardization Process, Uniqueness, Nirendranath Chakraborty.

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Nirendranath Chakraborty's poem "Amalkanti" is a rendition of the standardization process prevalent in our education system, as it does not provide the chance for uniqueness of any kind. All kids are made to think alike and perform alike; when they cannot do so, they are made to feel that they are not meant for what is to be achieved. Diversity is the essence of this world, and our education system, in all its policies and strategies, often tend to kill that diversity and uniqueness of individuals to manifest creatures of the same kind. The poem directly hits at how school education tries to make everyone a standard product without space for people like Amalkanti, who want to stand out with his zeal to do something different. Amalkanti wanted to become "sunlight" – a wish which looks pretty different and unique and even laughable to a certain extent. In other words, Amalkanti's desire and nature do not fit in with the system. He is a misfit who "wanted to be sunlight" during his school days and ended up working in a "poorly lit room of a printer" (Chakraborty, n. p.). The desire to become sunlight makes him distinct from others when he is a kid, but that same desire is a reason he lives a life in supposed poverty. The poverty of Amalkanti is not just his personal social and cultural marker. It is the manifestation of the poverty of our education policy which does not allow the uniqueness of Amalkanti to flourish in any way.

The journey that Amalkanti undertook in his life embodies the failure of our education system, which wants to make each individual a prototype of the same. Each child is treated in the same manner irrespective of his or her talents, wishes, competence, and dreams in our education system, which wants to produce creatures who can reproduce the same thing and not enjoy the beauty of things. Education has become a means to make a career, but more than that, it is a means to earn money (Portelli and Vibert 2012). Nirendranath Chakraborty, the poet, disagrees with this kind of education system, which does not nurture individual dreams and merely produces professionals who cannot think beyond the obvious. Critical thinking and engaging with the beauty of things, especially nature and fellow human beings, is often missing

in our education process, leading to the production of individuals who are just professionals without any sense of engagement and sensibility for others.

Each person by nature is different and needs to be nurtured differently, but our education system is different. Our education system wants to produce creatures of the same kind who are employable – who are job-ready and can furnish the competence according to the demands of society. Employability has become the *mantra* of our education, where skill development is the focus. No where there is a scope for a person to realize his or her dreams as per his or her wishes. We all are made to live according to the set standards of materialism, and those who cannot live up to those demands of materialism are usually thought to be no achievers. The narrator of the poem judges the grown-up Amalkanti according to his parameters and tells at the end of the poem:

“All of us got more or less, what we wanted,  
all except Amalkanti—  
who used to think so much about sunlight  
that he wanted to become sunlight” (Chakraborty 56).

According to the narrator, Amalkanti is a non-achiever per se—he is the epitome of failure who has not been able to achieve anything substantial in life. In his pursuit of sunlight, he has ended up in a dimly lit room of a printer. There is a tone of sympathy for Amalkanti, which makes the narrator speak with a tone of remorse. However, it is remorse, which is not necessary as Amalkanti probably is still desiring the sunlight and happy being not part of the so-called system of the world.

During his childhood, Amalkanti could not conjugate a verb; he looked baffled and stared out the window; all his classmates felt sorry for him. It is natural for every kid to think that Amalkanti is a failure as he cannot answer the simplest of lessons and is always lost in his own world. That Amalkanti is usually late for class again shows that he is meant for something other than the formal education system. Still, in today's world, each child must go through the same education process to achieve something substantial. Most children achieve what they desire or dream of, as the narrator says, "All of us got more or less, what we wanted, all except Amalkanti—" (Chakraborty 56).

Amalkanti is an exception—an exception who is an example for the other kids that if they pursue their wishes of becoming sunlight, then they can also end up in the dimly lit room of a printer, which is symbolic of the non-success, which embodies a non-achiever. Such non-achievers are always hated. They are examples for others who need to fit into the system. Amalkanti comes to meet the narrator often and discusses this and that over cups of tea and leaves. The narrator sees him off at the door. It seems the narrator could feel the pain of Amalkanti – the pain which pinches him as neither could Amalkanti be what the narrator is nor could he become sunlight. But the question at the poem's core is whether Amalkanti feels the same as the narrator. Does Amalkanti find himself to be sympathized with for not being able to achieve anything significant?

The poet Nirendranath Chakraborty does not answer this question. The narrator's tone makes us feel that Amalkanti has lost all passion for life as he could not become the sunlight. When the narrator says that “it wouldn't have made much difference to him” (Chakraborty n. p.) who became what, the readers know that it does not in any way matter to him. Amalkanti does not judge himself in comparison to others, in comparison to the achievements of his classmates. Usually, we are made to learn from childhood that competitiveness is crucial to success—that one needs to compete with others and be on the top to have the grace of

materialistic pleasures (Portelli and Vibert 2012). But Amalkanti had never had such a temperament—in his childhood, he was lost in his own world, in his dream of becoming sunlight, and now when he is not a child anymore, it does not matter to him whether his classmates have become doctors or lawyers.

His way of life, his means of looking at things, his perceptions, and his dreams are not of the mainstream, and Amalkanti had never tried to pursue the mainstream. He has been so in his childhood as he was never interested in the lessons taught in school, and similarly, he is now. People like Amalkanti seem to be an anomaly in the modern capitalistic world where the norm is competitive individualism—where each person is competing to reach the top. Such a rat race has been injected into each child's blood through the schooling process, through the sinuous interjections by elders to achieve higher goals in life, and then the child is left to fight the world to reach somewhere worthwhile. Some succeed, and many are failures (Portelli and Vibert 2012). The success stories are championed, and the ideology of competitive individualism gets the social sanction and is thus furthered in the next generations (Oakes 2005). Amalkanti stands outside this system, and by doing so, he critiques the system with his uniqueness with his zeal for standing apart from the system.

It is true that for a living, Amalkanti now works in a dimly lit printing house, but probably it is not of so much a concern for Amalkanti as it is for the narrator. The narrator considers Amalkanti, a friend and probably is trying to think that Amalkanti is not as successful as he himself is. Then, the narrator judges Amalkanti on his own parameter, which Amalkanti never does. That Amalkanti wanted to become sunlight is being mocked, and that he is now working in the dimly lit room is being derided, but all these are thoughts of the narrator. Amalkanti is nowhere there with his voice—telling us what he thinks. Amalkanti is probably as carefree as he was in his childhood, and it does not matter whether he works in a dimly lit room. Amalkanti does not judge, the narrator does. The education system may have made the narrator the same as we are and, therefore, unable to understand what Amalkanti desires.

Early adulthood is a phase of development of human life when aspirations, needs, and desires are shaped. At the same time, responsibilities, duties, career choices, academic pressures, peer pressure, the load of getting financially free, and various other factors make human life difficult. It is also a phase when one tries to settle down in life and simultaneously tries to realize his or her dreams (Hattie, 2009). It is a phase of life that can make or unmake a person, and the choices one makes affect life's journey. In this phase, usually, young adults are made to fall in place with the expectation of life. Amalkanti, probably in this phase, had gone through a challenging phase when he had to choose between his desire to be sunlight and to earn a living. As he grew up, he took a job at the printers so that he could survive, but that does not undermine his wish to become the sunlight.

As far as the social factors are concerned, the role of peer groups (professional, academic, and in general) and family circumstances significantly affect the development of the individual's psyche. The social standing of the family and the relationship one share with one's peer group usually tend to influence how one forms one's social identity and personality. But in the case of Amalkanti, nothing seems to matter. He considers the narrator his friend and often visits him at his office, where they have tea and discuss things here and there, but at no point has Amalkanti shown any dissatisfaction with what he is doing. It is the narrator who feels awkward about Amalkanti and therefore speaks on his behalf.

The question is—does Amalkanti need someone to speak on his behalf? Probably no! He does not, as he has never wanted himself to be doing what is expected of the people looking for

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standardization. His dreams were different, and he is paying the price for this, and there is no remorse on his part. The narrator is remorseful as he considers Amalkanti, a friend. It is very proper and caring on the narrator's part to think and feel for Amalkanti as he is one of us who does not have dreams like Amalkanti's. Still, at the same time, he should not be empathizing with Amalkanti in such a manner as Amalkanti is no sufferer. He is just different and tells the world that one who dares to think and live differently—for example, to become “sunlight”—also has a right to live according to his or her own expectations and should not be thought to be a misfit and people should not be remorseful for him. Amalkanti is the epitome of not submitting to the demands of the time and context and will always remain necessary for the system as by being unique and yet silent, he stands as a powerful critique of the standardization process of our education system.

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