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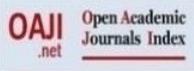
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Vinodkumar Damodaran

Unlived

As children, we were told to learn—
but all we did was memorize.

We learned subjects we never used,
and were judged for forgetting them.

Exams were not knowledge,
just the art of mugging up.

We mistook memory for intelligence
and watched others rise for it.

The world rewarded recall, not wisdom.

We followed paths drawn by others,
never questioning where they led.

We spent our youth chasing pay,
trading time for promotions,
dreams for deadlines—
until we looked up, and youth was gone.

We tried to impress,
but no one was watching.

We saved money for a future
we might never reach.

We guarded desires like secrets,
fearing judgment more than longing—
saving passion for a moment
that never truly arrived.

We gave our bodies to our spouses,
believing love meant possession.
But our desires stayed unfulfilled,
our passions buried before our bodies were.

We inherited taboos like old relics,
never questioning them,
ensuring no one enjoyed
what we were denied.

We built big houses

filled with untouched things—
and spent our lives maintaining them.

We worked endlessly,
stacked money in banks,
too afraid to spend it—
so we never truly lived.

We didn't travel when we could,
saved that money for the children.
We dreamed of places
they went instead, without us,
leaving us behind with caretakers.

We thought we had friends,
but they were only acquaintances.

We owned our time only in retirement—
and didn't know what to do with it.

We avoided sweets,
counted calories,
until illness took even the choice.

We held grudges,
tried to please—
and still, no one was pleased.

And one day, we realized—
we never truly enjoyed life.

We watched others live,
but never lived for ourselves.

We waited for the perfect moment
to dance, to forgive, to live...
but time never waited for us.

We hushed our joy
so others could sleep—
and in the end,
they woke up.
We didn't.

Vinodkumar Damodaran

Vinodkumar is from Kerala, Trivandrum, and lives with his wife and daughter. He is a doctoral student with multiple qualifications in management. Vinod is more of a storyteller, trainer, and coach than a poet, with a strong appreciation for all kinds of narratives—whether fiction, non-fiction, on paper, or through visuals.

With over 20 years of expertise in training and organizational development, Vinod has travelled to many countries across the world, connecting with a wide range of human experiences. His poetry is influenced by these encounters, delving into themes of missed opportunities, self-reflection, and the complexities of human connections.

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