

The Empty Podium

A Race That No One Truly Wins

The whistle blows.

Thousands sprint forward. Years blur into exams, rankings, cutoffs, and college names worn like medals. The crowd roars. A few are declared winners.

And then... silence.

At the finish line stands a podium. Empty.

Not because no one ran.

Not because no one succeeded.

But because the race was never designed to be won.

From classrooms to coaching centres, from report cards to résumés, life has been framed as a competition. Run faster. Score higher. Reach further. Pause, and you fall behind. Question it, and you're told this is just how the world works. This is the race everyone enters before they're old enough to understand it.

For many, fulfillment never arrives. Some reach top colleges, other high - paying jobs. Some reach the milestones they were told make everything worth it. Yet, even at the peak, the relief is temporary. The very applause for which sweat, blood and tears were shed for, fade quickly replaced by new expectations, a higher bar, just another finish line further away.

In this race, what we call winning is just permission to keep running.

The cost is rarely acknowledged. Burnout becomes normal. Curiosity is killed, replaced by compliance. Passion is postponed. Those who stop running, who step off the track are labeled failures. But perhaps they see the truth sooner than others. Leaving is mistaken for losing, when it may be the first real choice one makes.

The real tragedy is not that some fail to reach the podium, but that even those who do find it hollow and lacking.