# Understanding literacy work: Into the light

Artists use various platforms to communicate their message to the intended audience. The art can be in form of dance, play, music, drawings, films and literature in poems and novels. The novelists have an aim of passing information by expressing different themes in literature so that readers can get the unique meaning of what is being conveyed. The use of literature in communicating and expressing the viewpoints of authors as well as influencing the perceptions of the audience has been in existence for many centuries. Similarly, a famous Korean novelist Kim Sa-Ryang has used literary work as a platform for communicating his experiences in a different country – Japan; the discrimination faced and the general challenges faced when someone is not considered as a national of the country he is living in. He is among the generational descendants of Korean origin who lived in Japan as a result of migrating during the industrial revolution era in Japan. This essay elaborates how literary work has been used to express how his teaching profession has been perceived in Japan, the viewpoints and effects of culture.

The novelist describes the events that led to the colonization of Koreans by Japanese and how they found themselves in a foreign country of Japan. There are problems they face in Japan; among them is inferior treatment and general discrimination by the Japanese. There is a collective name given to all Korean immigrants in Japan, “Zainichi” which was used specifically to indicate the difference between the two races and of course to underestimate the Koreans. Nam is a qualified teacher and he attends his duties professionally in Japan, however, he is still referred as Minami. His students who comprise of young children like him very much and they treat him with respect except Yamada Haruo who is generally undisciplined and buries even fellow learners. Owing to Yamada’s misbehaviors, the teacher tries to collect him but instead Yamada has a hidden agenda of expressing open discrimination against the teacher based on his origin - Korea. The surprising thing is that even fellow teachers referred Nam as Minami, just to make him look odd although he did not show discomfort. Contrastingly, children like him so much as their teacher and they surround him calling him (innocently) “Mr Minami” jovially willing to play with him as usual; “pick me up, pick me up” as it was common for them to have that social interaction with him. This signifies that children are tolerant and do not really bother about a person’s race or nationality contrary to grownups.

The enmity against Koreans is further shown when Yi approaches Minami at his home when he was having his family time just to provoke him because he was a foreigner. He sarcastically initiates greetings in the Korean language unlike before just to show him the open revelation that he is a Korean. This looks awkward because as the novelists put it, Yi used to benefit from the evening classes at Minami’s place after his busy day as a driver. When he was being taught mathematics and English during part time, he was learning and benefiting but now he just ‘discovered’ his teacher is different, learning stops and quarrels begins. Even when convinced by Minami to sit so they can resolve their differences like adults, he still refused. He insists the surname is different as if the name is more important than the individual. This indicates how the illiterate people remain in ignorance and poverty due to consideration of irrelevant details such as nationality or tribes instead of appreciating the diversity and considering the long term mutual benefit.

Yamada takes grudge against his teacher at a higher level by mobilizing other students who were content with their teacher to treat him differently because he was a Korean. The battle against the teacher seems to take more energy than it deserves, but, what if that energy was diverted elsewhere more constructive? It would definitely yield better results. Although the teacher fought back and calmed the situation that did not change the perception or the viewpoint he was still Korean. His conflict continued with Yamada until he started being more vigilant and taking care while moving around, an indication that tension was very high by some Japanese against the Koreans. Yamada is later faced with the challenge of heavy storm which wets him allover and takes refuge at Minami’s place. The host does not revenge but treats him with care and love including giving him changing cloths and hot tea to warm his body. This is a surprise considering how the two have been relating. It shows a view that despite being a Korean, Minami could not discriminate Japanese that is why he helped the boy. The perception is that those discriminated are of help and everyone needs help from the other person irrespective of their differences. A talk between the two opponents – Yamada and Minami has now taken a different direction and they engage in a friendly talk where Minami learns that Yamada has psychological problems due to the failure of his parents to remain together in marriage as a result of race differences making Yamada to be a street boy. They became great friends from that moment onwards. This illustrates the impact of negative consequences that are caused when discrimination sets in and how people can live in harmony if they stop it.

From the analysis, it is evident that colonization of Koreans by Japanese happened from 1868 to 1910. Although it was meant by Japan to gather more resources from Korea to enable industrial revolution take place effectively in Japan, other negative consequences resulted from that initiative. The interaction between the two distinct nationals was relatively sour. Racism was openly exercised in various levels of life and at different stages of people’s growth and development. Children from either ethnic group are not bothered about the colonization, identity and race. On the contrary, their parents are more focused on those vices more to an extent of training their children on how to segregate a certain group. The author reveals how a simple act of goodness or evil that takes a few days, months or years can have effects that will last for decades or centuries. Ignorance is a contributing factor towards racism and discrimination but still it is still common among the educated.

Literature has therefore been effectively used to communicate the important message by describing how the relationship between Japanese and Koreans used to be towards the end of 18th century and beginning of 19th century. It is possible for somebody who was not there to have an overview of what was happening and to get the author’s perception towards the act.

## Reference

Sa-Ryang, K (1939). Into the Light (*Hikari no naka ni*). An Anthology of Literature by Koreans in Japan (Wender, M.L ed). University of Hawaii Press