

Why the Lessons of Sam-Il-Jeol Still Matter Today

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The first time I learned about the March 1st Movement, or Sam-Il-Jeol, it felt like a distant historical event, something confined to textbooks rather than connected to my everyday life. But as I grew to understand what truly happened on March 1, 1919, I began to see how deeply its lessons relate to the world I live in today and even to the choices I make as a high school student. Sam-Il-Jeol is not just a story about the past; it is a reminder that courage, unity, and the willingness to speak out against injustice remain just as necessary now as they were over a century ago.

The March 1st Movement began during a time when Korea was under harsh Japanese colonial rule. Koreans were denied political freedom, cultural expression, and basic human dignity. In response, thirty-three leaders drafted the Declaration of Independence, igniting peace demonstrations that spread across the country. Students, religious leaders, shopkeepers, and families marched together, fully aware of the risks. Many were arrested or severely punished, yet they refused to accept injustice in silence. Their resistance demonstrated that moral conviction and unity can challenge even the most powerful systems of oppression.

Although independence did not come immediately, the movement strengthened Korea's national identity and inspired future efforts toward freedom. It also drew international attention to Korea's struggle and demonstrated the power of collective action. The sacrifices made by activists continue to symbolize the importance of standing firm in the face of unfairness. One figure who resonates deeply with me is Yu Gwan-sun, a sixteen-year-old student who helped organize demonstrations and continued to resist even after imprisonment. Her courage reminds me that history is not shaped only by well-known leaders but also by ordinary individuals who refuse to remain silent. Her story challenges me to reflect on what it means to have courage in my own life. The lessons of Sam-Il-Jeol remain important because injustice has not disappeared but has simply taken different forms. Around the world, people face discrimination, unequal treatment, and

barriers that prevent their voices from being heard. The March 1st Movement teaches that silence can allow unfairness to continue, but collective action can transform fear into strength. It shows that when individuals unite around shared values, they create momentum for change.

I have come to understand this lesson personally through my volunteer work at the Korean American Family Service Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and empowering individuals affected by domestic violence and sexual assault. As a member of the Youth Community Project Team, I participated in the Silent March Against Domestic Violence, an experience that shaped how I view advocacy and courage. As I marched alongside my fellow high school volunteers and KAFSC staff in complete silence, holding signs, the quiet felt powerful. That silence reflected the fear and stigma that often surround abuse, yet it was purposeful. Every step we took was a statement that we refuse to ignore injustice. During the march, I found myself thinking about the demonstrators of March 1, 1919, who gathered peacefully and cried out, “대한 독립 만세!” Their chant was a public declaration that oppression would not define them. Our march began in silence, but it ended with a unified chant: “Break the silence, end the violence!” When we raised our voices together, I felt a shift from silent endurance to collective strength. Though the words and context were different, the principle was the same: when people unite and raise their voices boldly, they declare that injustice will not be tolerated.

Ultimately, the March 1st Movement is not confined to the past. Its lessons continue to live wherever people choose fairness over indifference and courage over silence. More than a century later, the voices that called for independence still echo, reminding us that progress begins when ordinary people refuse to accept injustice as normal. The world we live in today is complex and often divided. Social issues can feel overwhelming, and change can seem slow. Yet the March 1st Movement reminds us that meaningful change starts with unity, moral courage, and the decision to step forward. By carrying forward the courage and unity of Sam-Il-Jeol, we ensure that the fight for justice and dignity continues in every generation.