



# The Art of Kintsugi for Classroom Wellness

(A study based on the lives of Kamala Das and Mary Kom)

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**Abstract**— In today's world of technology and intense competition students' mental health is very crucial in addition to the innovative teaching tools and methods. In this competitive world where technology is upbeat, competition is rife, expectations are high, students face several mental health issues which hamper their academic and personal growth. The objective of this study is to prepare students to face such mental issues and to grow through them. To improve mental health and to deal with stress successfully, the researcher used the ideology 'Kintsugi', the Japanese art of repairing fragmented pottery with gold, silver, or platinum lacquer. Rather than hiding the cracks, Kintsugi highlights them, celebrating the object's imperfections. By introducing the philosophy of Kintsugi, the researcher attempts to teach young students to accept flaws, embrace imperfections rather than concealing them or running away from challenges. The study found that those students who use this philosophy positively, accepted their mistakes and developed a spirit of resilience.



**Keywords**— Student Mental Health, Competitive Stress, Innovative Teaching, Kintsugi Philosophy, Resilience Development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Classroom wellness is vital for creating an ambient learning environment where students feel secure, nurtured and supported, giving them emotional and mental stability and contributing to their physical and social well-being. Beyond classroom learning and advanced teaching techniques are the all-important concepts of students' mental health and happiness which contribute to classroom wellness, creative thinking and healthy minds. In this racing world where technology is upbeat, competition is rife, expectations are high, students fail to cope with the mind-boggling performance pressure and mundane classroom teaching. They are broken into shards and unable to gather their lives back from the shambles. In this context, it is crucial that we teach them to embrace imperfections, to rise from the ashes and to see beauty in being broken. This can be achieved if only we create a congenial learning environment where students feel safe, resilient to rise above the storms of life and carefree in mind to learn.

The objective of this study is to prepare students to face such mental issues and ensure their growth through the vagaries of life, by introducing the ideology of 'Kintsugi', the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, silver, or platinum lacquer. Rather than hiding the cracks, Kintsugi emphasizes them, celebrating the object's imperfections. To elaborate this ancient practice of Kintsugi and understand its relevance in coping as well as overcoming, we will dissect and analyze the lives of distinguished poetess Kamala Das and the eminent lady of the boxing rings Mary Kom. Their lives, although on different planes, are similar in how they managed to build a beautiful, successful life from a broken and downtrodden past, offering a great lesson to learn and emulate for the young students, under the expert guidance of able teachers.

### 1.1 Why should we prioritize classroom wellness?

It goes without saying that when students feel well, they learn well and that is the reason why mental health in classrooms has gained currency amongst the educationalists, parents, and policymakers. The profound

impact of mental health and wellness on young minds, their quality of learning and public behavior cannot be written off anymore. When the focus shifts to wellbeing, learning becomes an interesting joyride where all emotional baggage is trashed and discarded and the students' free wheel into the realm of knowledge.

As teachers, we come across myriad students' problems every day. Often off-loaded on to our plate is a range of wellness issues which manifest in children such as anxiety and panic attacks, unexplainable depression, ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), eating disorders like bulimia or anorexia, sleeping in class or complaining of physical incapacities like headaches, stomachaches, with no clear cause or even aggression and defiance. We are bound to tackle performance issues when a student is grappling with emotional upheaval like anxiety or depression. He or she often struggles to concentrate, focus on academics, or even to retain information in mind with the result that the student fails in class or the performance level drops to an all-time low. Their confidence level ebbs low, and they treat themselves like outcasts, unable to mix with peers, shying away from attending regular classes, thus leading to absenteeism.

Yet another aspect is the behavioral delinquency that kicks in when problems pile up without being properly channeled or addressed. Unresolved matters mount up into mental health issues which finally lead to disruptive behavior in class or in similar public spaces. While some children become reticent and recalcitrant, some others become aloof, withdrawn and distanced. Such an unhealthy climate mars the quality of classroom dynamics and learning.

#### 1.2 What is the roadmap to classroom wellness?

Teachers as guiding beacons have a bigger role to play in ensuring classroom wellness. One sure-shot winning formula to ease the tension in the classroom is to encourage open discussions where every student is allowed to voice their opinions on mental health. Let the positive vibes about mental health freely flow within the four walls of the classroom so that the deeply disturbed minds benefit from its calming and soothing effect. Incorporating mindfulness and breathing exercises at the beginning of the day is an effective way to start the daily drill which enhances the mood and irons out troublesome thoughts. Using trauma-informed teaching practices, focusing on coping mechanisms and emotional intelligence, shall certainly help in attaining classroom wellness. Likewise, integrating age-appropriate curriculum about mental health as part of the academics will help in developing coping skills in young students from an early age. Keeping in mind the rising cases of suicides and mental disorders amongst the student

community, it is imperative that every educational institution provides free access to well trained and supportive, on-campus counselors, psychologists, and social workers. More importantly teachers should be trained and equipped with basic mental health literacy and tools to support students in agony. This helps to foster an inclusive classroom culture where students feel safe, heard, and respected. Where required, the teachers and counselors shall involve parents or other family members to ensure that there is consistent and continuous support provided to the distressed minds. With a good support web around the young student, we can ensure early detection and intervention before the problems escalate and spiral out of control.

### II. WHAT IS KINTSUGI AND HOW DOES IT HELP?

Here is where the art of Kintsugi has a bigger role to play. The word 'Kintsugi' means golden joinery, and it refers to the Japanese art of repairing destroyed pottery by using priceless and valuable gold, silver, or platinum polish. This process teaches us that we are not any less valuable because we are broken. On the other hand, our value has increased, and we have now become invaluable because we have healed and grown through the process. Just like glittering gold adding to the beauty of the cracked edges of pottery, our growth shines brilliantly in those very same places where we were once fragmented and fractured. In this fashion, Kintsugi has become a compelling metaphor for mental health and emotional healing. The slogan of this philosophy is 'I am not broken. I am wonderfully repaired'. By adopting Kintsugi as our daily life mantra, we learn to accept our emotional scars and to wear the imperfections with pride instead of hiding them or disguising them in false armors.

### III. EXPLORING KINTSUGI IN THE LIFE OF KAMALA DAS

Kamala Das is one of the distinguished and well recognized Indian poets in English who carved a niche space in the hearts of the literary lovers, through her brutal candidness and explicit narratives. She explored the sensual desires of the body without any qualms and inhibitions, shocking the closed minded conventional patriarchal society. She was verbally assaulted by the conservative thinkers of her times but she never got tired of the slander and defamation while she constantly dealt with the conundrum of 'unrequited love' and ruthlessness of 'sex' between incompatible partners. Through her literary works, she exposed the fragility of man-woman relationship which exists only in

letter and not in spirit, void of love and passion. Even though ill-health plagued her from young days, the fire in her belly to perform and excel, kept her bouncing back to life. Through her life's journey, we find the unmistakable spirit of Kintsugi, the philosophy of accepting brokenness and getting back to life, more magnificently, resonating in her literary voice in profound ways.

All through her life, she struggled relentlessly to create her own identity and make her presence felt. She was subjected to racism in severe doses at school, bullied by classmates for being brown skinned, made to hide behind the lavatory when VIP delegates were visiting the school and more importantly, her very own work was read out in class by a white skinned fellow classmate when she was sidelined and marginalized. Soon, at the age of fifteen she was taken off school to be married to a much older person who shattered her dreams and aspirations. Her childhood was laced with loneliness and emotional neglect and her unfulfilling marriage broke her into pieces both in body and in spirits. Yet, she rose high from the ashes and channeled her miserable experiences into world renowned poetry. In other words, her cracks in life became the raw material for her works. Through poetry and memoir, she defied the conventional taboos and continued to articulate freely her emotional pain and bodily desires.

Writing unrestrained became her doorway to healing, and her unbridled honesty turned her pain into powerful words that cut through like a knife, shocking the complacent society. She was constantly navigating between an obedient wife and passionate lover, in search of love, even outside the ambit of marriage. She was all at once a private, shy woman but at the same time a strong and forceful writer. Her confessional style, like the art of Kintsugi, didn't hide anything but on the other hand, highlighted every hurt, each wound, restyling fragility into beauty. She wore her multiple identities like the many cracks on the Kintsugi pot, evolving herself into a much - revered public figure. Her words were the golden lacquer giving exquisite elegance to her work of art. She embraced the beauty of imperfection when she refused to conform to the idealized image of the Indian woman. On the contrary, she dared to speak and write openly about female sexuality, mental weaknesses and emotional breakdowns. Instead of hiding the many flaws in her, she highlighted them as the central themes in her writing, just as Kintsugi glorifies the scar and not hiding it.

In summary, Kamala Das is a perfect example of living life the Kintsugi way. Her life was not an easy ride on an even tenor. Whereas it was broken, smeared and trampled on. Yet, through her determination and ruthless honesty, she courageously repaired her life through painful and poignant

art, transforming her vulnerability into strength, leaving her distinct legacy behind for the generations to come. Kamala Das - a life destroyed by bitter experiences but yet a complete Kintsugi pot, marked by golden seams of courage, resilience and self-esteem.

#### IV. THREAD OF KINTSUGI IN THE LIFE OF MARY KOM

Mary Kom is a six-time World Amateur Boxing champion, a bronze medalist at the 2012 London Olympics, and the first Indian woman to ever win a medal at the Olympics. Known as "Magnificent Mary" for her accomplishments in a male dominated world of sports, precisely boxing, her life shows that strength is not about the absence of struggle but it is the alchemy of misery and agony metamorphosing into purpose and determination.

Mary was born into a poverty-stricken tribal family in rural Manipur, who made their living through farming on leased land. Therefore, she was regarded as a slum dog, reeking of lack and indigence. Her childhood, typical of any underprivileged child from similar living circumstances, was marked by extreme scarcity, deficiency and dearth. She was forced to work on the farming land to earn for her schooling lest she had to drop out of school.

She was inspired to delve into the boxing rings when she saw the success of fellow boxer Dingko Singh, who won a gold medal at the 1998 Asian Games. However, burdened by limited resources, she had no access to professional training facilities and had to train in the village boxing arena with no protective gear. But what was mentally harrowing for her was the disapproval of her own father, a former wrestler, who didn't want his daughter to perform combat sports. Despite being endowed with a distinct flair for boxing, she had to practice in hiding, for fear of bearing the brunt of father's anger.

Boxing was an area reserved for the men with muscle power. As a young woman, when Mary entered this male dominion, she was ridiculed and reduced to a laughing stock. But Mary, with sheer determination and grit, overcame this gender bias and broke the stereotypes and societal norms to script her life's story of unparalleled success, while balancing her career with other important roles of her life as wife and mother. Marriage and motherhood posed as herculean obstacles in her roadway to success. She faced immense pressure to forgo her career after marriage. Later, when she became a mother, she was questioned for continuing in the boxing ring. Undaunted, she strived hard to overcome the physical and emotional challenges of returning to the highest level of competition after being a mother. She was always juggling between all

the roles of her life, desperately trying to find the right balance.

Notably, instead of retreating, she embraced every role and accepted life's challenges, allowing them to fuel her growth into a wholesome new self. There were many setbacks in her life where she considered quitting but she chose to overcome them and continue her pursuit of her dream. The innumerable cracks in her life, social, financial, and conventional, never shattered her. Instead, they added to her inner beauty and became the sparkles of her gold-laced strength. Every loss, injury, and failure that she endured became signature marks of her persistence, patience and endurance, adding to the radiance of her triumph. Like the worn out Kintsugi pot, she didn't care to hide the pain or the cracks but let them shape her legacy. Her story is all about overcoming adversity, having faith in our own capabilities, and chasing our heart's desires. Today, she is celebrated as an epitome of strength, perseverance and determination. An acclaimed founder of Mary Kom Boxing Academy, she is a source of inspiration to young minds.

## V. KINTSUGI IN CLASSROOM FOR WELLNESS

Kintsugi is a reminder that healing doesn't mean returning to who we were before. What it means is to emerge stronger and more resilient as we walk through the furnace of hardships. Instead of being consumed by the flames, we step out more determined, better molded and shaped. We begin to accept that every roadblock need not always be a stumbling block. But, let it be our stepping stone to a brighter future. Instead of masking our pain or rejecting the low tide seasons, Kintsugi encourages us to carry the weight or burden like medals on our chest, as they signify our experiences which have reformed us into a better and stronger person. It is not vulnerability but strength that is manifested in our life's chapters.

Inculcating the philosophy of Kintsugi in the classroom is an effective way to teach students about resilience, self-worth, perseverance, emotional intelligence, and determination. The guiding principle of Kintsugi, the willingness to accept imperfections and to make the best out of it, should be integrated with the regular lessons, be a part of open discussions, and be embedded in the classroom culture to enhance and enrich the academic and emotional growth of the students.

In the classroom, we should implement Kintsugi as part of social-emotional learning. Creating a 'Kintsugi Wall' is a novel way to introduce the concept to the children. Urge the students to share their personal strengths which emerged from encountering and overcoming hardships. Let them debate and discuss how those impediments or mistakes

helped them grow. The lessons of the stronger children will kindle the fecundity of thinking and help the weaker ones to see life from a different perspective. It will help them reflect on self-worth and healing and eventually live their life in a new way and style. They will open up and share their misery and agony, so long bottled up, which is the first step towards healing. Such sharing sessions help to create stronger peer groups and support communities which will benefit the entire class. Over the days, children begin to accept that:

- Mistakes are part of learning and growing
- When we walk through winding roads, we might be shaken and broken but we are growing in reasoning, logical thinking and maturity

## VI. CONCLUSION

When wellness is prioritized through social and emotional learning (SEL) concepts like Kintsugi, students are better able to manage stress, anxiety, and emotional challenges. A calm and supportive classroom helps students develop resilience and self-control skills. When they are in better control of themselves, it manifests positively in academic performance, in turn. Students who feel happy and secure are more likely to concentrate, participate, and succeed academically. Hitherto, a vibrant, engaging classroom ambience promotes concentration, participation, sharpens memory power and yields better success rates.

Yet another undeniable aspect of social and emotional learning (SEL) is that students develop empathy and show consideration for one another. The channel of communication flows freely and uninterrupted so that it becomes an effective tool for building conflict resolution skills, leading to healthier peer relationships and reduced bullying. A wellness-focused classroom nurtures a growth mindset in the young children. They begin to see mistakes as part of the learning process, building confidence and perseverance and a positive attitude towards life's challenges. The concept of Kintsugi and wellness aren't just for students. It is applicable for teachers too who easily get burnt out and exhausted when tutoring unresponsive classes. A positive classroom weather helps the teacher thrive and flourish, giving their best to the benefit of the learners. In other words, the teaching efficiency index is high in a healthy classroom.

Because wellness promotes equity and inclusion, regardless of ethnicity, gender, race, caste or ability/disability, every student as well as teacher feels valued and respected. In short, to all intents and purposes, addressing mental health in classrooms isn't just an ethical obligation but a compelling necessity to build a healthy, successful student community and on a larger scale, a more

compassionate society. Integrating mental health awareness into everyday classroom practice helps in promoting self-acceptance, consideration and empathy. By normalizing failure and imperfections as part of growth, students accept the Kintsugi way of life, and are tutored to embrace brokenness and at the same time, to see the beauty in it.

‘Those shattered shards with cracked edges  
 Like a heart mangled by chiseled wedges  
 Aching fractured seams painted in gold  
 Are but polished scars of misery untold  
 Yet broken is beautiful, a tale of resilience  
 A phoenix rising high with pristine grace  
 Profoundly invaluable is life’s fallibility  
 As the Kintsugi pot with gilded lacquer frailty’

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