



Professor of Prose and Poetry

Aruni Kashyap, assistant professor of English at the University of Georgia, Athens, is a gifted writer and translator of India's regional literature. A keen love of Indian languages informs his writing and collegiate syllabi. While his students may never know that Kashyap learned to drive a car only recently, they are familiar with the rigor of his classes and appreciate the rewards of his teaching.

By REETIKA KHANNA

You grew up in Assam, where you narrated your short stories in Assamese for the public radio. What drew you into the world of literature?

I was born in the world of literature. My mother was the Indian novelist Dipti Dutta Das, who wrote in Assamese, and my father, Surjya Das, is also a writer. I grew up in a family that valued books and good music. Our family friends were academics and writers. All of these definitely immersed me in a culture where books were central in our lives.

Who are some of the authors that influenced your writing?

Assamese writer Indira Goswami, Bengali writer Ashapurna Devi, Amitav Ghosh and Toni Morrison were my first creative writing teachers.

Your stories, poems and essays have appeared in *The Boston Review*, *The New York Times*, *The Guardian* and other leading outlets. You have penned several books—fiction and poetry—that were well-received

and nominated for awards. *The Chicago Review of Books* described *There is No Good Time for Bad News* as “an arrangement of unordinary events, about lives who find a way against state-triggered duress and recreate history through their survival.” What fuels your poetry and prose?

I think it is love for the world around me that fuels all my writing. People and their stories interest me. The beauty of the world inspires me. I try to keep all these things alive in my writing. Despite the daily brutality of the world, I am always in search of meaning and beauty. The problems in the world anger me but also prod me to create art, and this art emerges from a space of happiness, not horror.

What stirred your interest in academia? How long have you been an educator? What are the most gratifying aspects of being a professor?

I have been working as a teacher since 2011; I have been an educator since 2004. In college, I used to volunteer with a group of other Delhi University students to teach young students living around the university campus who couldn't afford private tuition. We used to teach them for free every evening. I found a lot of meaning in that work, and it was even more satisfying when one of those students from the evening classes

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Talk Time

used to enroll themselves in Delhi University and teach with us. I am in academia because I wanted to write, but I didn't want to depend on my writing for earnings. I was worried that it would have taken away the joy of writing and turn it into homework, and I hated homework as a student. So I decided to teach because it came naturally to me, gave me satisfaction, and also left me enough time to work on my art. I think the most gratifying part of being a teacher is to see the progress of students. Many of my students and mentees are an important part of my life now. They are part of my extended family and have forged lifelong friendships with me. I think this is invaluable.

How do you think your students would describe your teaching style?

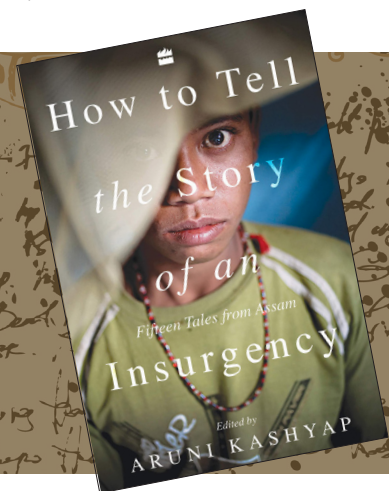
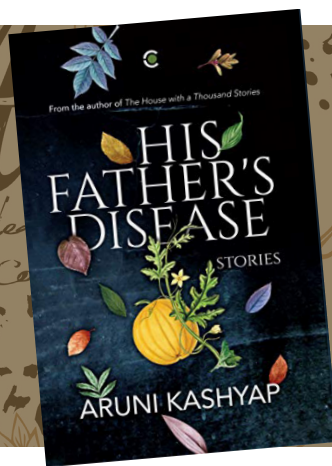
I hope they say that I set the bar high. I do that because the world outside the classroom is brutal, and

Many students today use tools like Grammarly.com to edit errors. Does the dependence on such resources help students or hinder learning?

I do think overdependence on artificial intelligence in our learning process is not a good thing. A person who knows the rules and can apply them would always have an upper hand because they will also know when to break the rules to develop an individual style, that will make their sentences stand out. If you want to be outstanding, you will have to know the rules and be able to play with them. Grammarly will not teach you this. I don't mind if apps are used for proofreading.

Do you permit your students to listen to audiobooks in lieu of reading?

I don't mandate anything. I need my students to remember the texts. They are welcome to use any methods to remember them.



setting the bar high inside the classroom will prepare them for the high standards outside the classroom.

You received your undergraduate degree and a master's in English Literature from St. Stephen's College in Delhi. How do the mandated methods of education in India differ from those in America? Is one technique better than the other?

I studied before the semester system was introduced, and I liked that we had so much time to discuss certain concepts. Especially, literary texts. We spent so much time on a single novel or a single essay with our teachers. But I hated exams. I also disliked the fact that the teachers were not allowed to make their own syllabi in the Indian university system. Here, I have the freedom to choose the texts I will teach. I also have the freedom to find the best ways to assessing students, instead of depending on the annual examination system.

Well-intentioned parents, especially protective Indian parents, are often deeply involved in their children's academic careers and steer them in the direction that they believe will serve them best. How should well-meaning parents help their children without becoming "helicopter parents"?

I wouldn't be able to say that because almost all the students I teach are adults. Their parents are not involved in their academic life. Even if they are, my students haven't told me about that. Also, FERPA (the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) keeps such parents at bay in the university.



Author of *Kismetwali & Other Stories*, Reetika Khanna is an Atlanta-based freelance writer who likes to spotlight people with purpose. She has worked with ELLE as a senior features writer, and as an associate features editor with ELLE DÉCOR, Mumbai. For more, go to ReetikaKhanna.com