



working relationship with Houston, and he tried to restrain her worst impulses. About Houston's ex-husband, Bobby Brown, he writes, "I don't believe Bobby caused Whitney's problems, but the two of them brought out the worst in each other."

Almost the only person who wrinkles his sense of ease is Kelly Clarkson, who never admitted he was right about *Since U Been Gone*, a song she didn't want to record.

Mottola, 63, was born in the Bronx. He performed and cut some singles under the name T.D. Valentine before making his mark as the manager of Hall and Oates, John Mellencamp and Carly Simon. His career at CBS Records and Sony was

largely marked by his tempestuous marriage to Carey, who was more than two decades his junior, and by his breaking out the so-called Latin Explosion performers Gloria Estefan, Jennifer Lopez, Shakira and Martin.

He admits it was "absolutely wrong and inappropriate" for him to get involved with Carey. He can't help getting some writerly revenge, though. "By the way," he says, less than chivalrously, "it was Mariah who asked me to marry her."

In *Hitmaker* he recounts his battles with George Michael and Michael Jackson, who both saw their careers sliding. He's a keen observer of boardroom intrigue. "When someone gets whacked, it's always

easy to point the finger at the guy who's closest. Especially when his last name ends in a vowel," he writes.

Mottola's upbeat but essentially lightweight book is marred by canned testimonials from the famous people he's come to know. These make *Hitmaker* feel like an infomercial.

Each of these talented men senses that he's led a charmed life. Both seem to agree with something that Davis says, about the day he was first summoned by Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel to listen to tracks from *Bridge Over Troubled Water*, their final studio record: "I felt privileged to be in the room." *The New York Times*

## Hindu religious classics remade for modern world

History constantly repeats itself for Indian author Samhita Arni - but with a touch of subversion. Her three mythological books retell Hindu religious epics from an unconventional, often feminist, viewpoint. The 28-year-old Arni published her first book on the much-loved epic, *The Mahabharata*, when she was 12. Her second, *Sita's Ramayana*, a graphic novel in partnership with Indian artist Moyna Chitrakar, retold the *Ramayana* through the eyes of the heroine Sita, considered the ideal of Indian womanhood. The book rose to No 7 on *The New York Times'* bestseller list for graphic novels. Her latest novel, *The Missing Queen*, turns the *Ramayana* into a pacy, noirish thriller, with the hero - the deity Ram - daringly portrayed as a benevolent but perhaps Machiavellian ruler. She talks to **Kavitha Rao**

**You began writing your first book, *The Mahabharata: A Child's View*, when you were barely 8, although it was published when you were 12. How does a child get so interested in mythology?**

Well, it really started when I lived in Pakistan as a child; my father was a diplomat. It was a fairly restricted life, because relations between India and Pakistan were tense. The only books we had in the consulate were religious ones. I became obsessed with the *Mahabharata* because there was a certain parallel to my life. The warring cousins in the epic were uncannily similar to the enmity between India and Pakistan, and so were the difficult choices made to avoid conflict. Over a few years, I wrote my own version and drew my own illustrations. My mother showed my version to a local children's books publisher, who decided to publish it.

**Why do you think the classics need to be retold?**

Most people only know the original version of the *Ramayana*, by Valmiki, but actually it has a long tradition of being retold by various storytellers. It has taken on a life of its own, especially with the countless oral traditions. How do you make people relate to the epics? To keep them relevant, for them to have meaning for us today, I believe they need to be retold, reclaimed even.

**Writing about religious icons is always risky, especially in India's current volatile climate, where books and films have spurred violent protests, even the arrest of authors who read from *The Satanic Verses* at the 2012 Jaipur Literary Festival. Has this made you more wary in your writing?**

Absolutely. I am sorry to admit it - maybe I am a coward - but I don't want to be another Salman Rushdie! In my new book, Ram is the ruler of an often tyrannical state, like one of India's modern-day politicians, and his brother Lakshman is a paunchy bureaucrat, so I have come close to the boundaries, but I have not stepped over the line, I think. But also, I wanted people who are religious to read it, and not be so offended as to toss the book away. I tried to be respectful and keep the

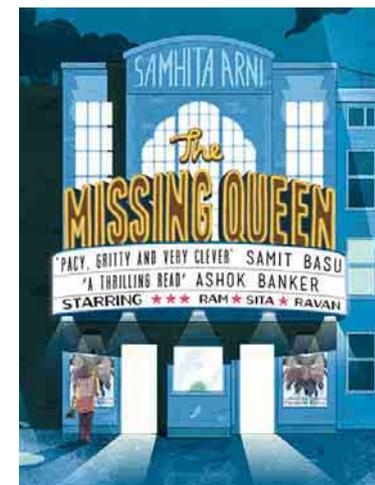
spirit of the original epic alive, and I hope I have succeeded.

**You are an unapologetic feminist. How do you reconcile your views with the sometimes misogynistic portrayal of women in the epics?**

It's true that the epics, on the face of it, do not give women a voice, and vilify many women characters. But, if you look at songs and stories adapted from the epics, they are a voice for the marginalised. The songs that women sing when working in the field, the tales they tell, reflect both the trials of Sita and their own trials. I find this fascinating, and it inspired me to write about the epics from the point of view of those overlooked.

***Sita's Ramayana* made it to No 7 on the *New York Times* bestseller list for graphic novels. Why do you think it appealed to foreign readers?**

I think it was the fantastic, original artwork and format. It had nothing to do with me! My aim in that book was to simply support Moyna's fantastic illustrations.



***The Missing Queen* constantly mentions "Shining Ayodhya" (Ram's kingdom) which eventually turns out to mask a bullying, insensitive state. Was that a parallel with the "India Shining" campaign (a government public relations campaign to emphasise India's economic growth)?**

Yes, certainly. I came back to India in 2006, when the "India Shining" campaign was at its peak, after 10 years away. And it struck me then that the *Ramayana* is still a matter of public discourse. People would talk about Ram Rajya (Ram's rule) as the perfect government; judgments would mention Sita as the ideal Indian woman. Then I started thinking: what was the price of this perfection? That inspired the book.

**What's next for you?**

I definitely want to do something different next, perhaps something funny. I don't want to constantly write about mythology and be typecast. At the moment, I am working in Kabul for an Afghan media company, writing the script for a local cop show, and dodging bombs and explosions from time to time.