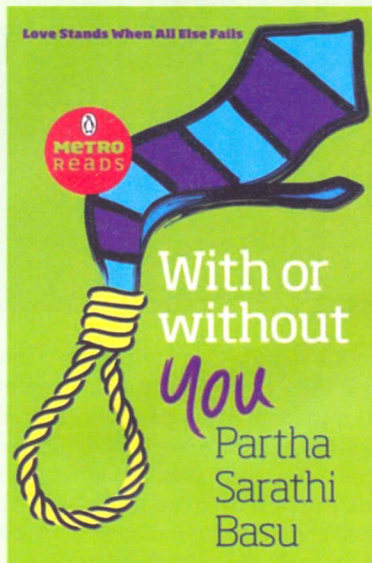


# In Lighter Vein



**With or Without You**

by: Partha Sarathi Basu

Publisher: Penguin Metro Reads

Pages: 214

Price: Rs. 150

A new series with the Penguin imprint, *Metro Reads* completes a year of launch this February, and is designed to fit the needs of busy people whose lifestyles include commuting to work for no less than three to four hours a day on average.

Supposedly perfect for those who read on the move - something quick, fast paced, lightweight and breezy - they are easily digestible stories ideal for a plane or train journey, or for that rare lazy afternoon at home.

The storylines are simple and from every day, the characters, easily understood. The page-turners have been written mostly by first-time authors from different walks of life. They are books, says the Penguin *Metro Reads* Face-

book page, "that don't weigh you down with complicated, boring stories, don't ask for much time, don't have to be lugged around." Meaning what were once called potboilers but are now referred to as 'crossover' books — not literature, but good enough to 'bridge the divide' between literary and commercial fiction.

One of the latest offerings from this stable is *With or Without You*, by Partha Sarathi Basu. His list of corporate employers reads like a Forbes 100 database - he is currently CFO and Wholtime Director of AkzoNobel India - and possibly it is all of his considerable experience that he draws upon in sketching the brutal corporate world of his book and its rather murky underbelly.

**What is the story about ?**

The central premise of the book is that corporate life is savage and has always been. Every corporate executive is ruled by sets of different goals – personal, professional, and organisational. The vicious tactics often used to achieve these ends are simply disguised behind a facade of sophistication and professionalism. And all of this world functions within a clearly different set of rules which

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could have been set thousands of years ago - the rules of the jungle.

The reader moves through raw ambition, convenient suspension of integrity, deceit, and smear campaigns - as executives relentlessly march towards their constantly changing goals. The book describes politics in an office environment and how things, situations, and words have the capacity to go awry and change people. It is about how people compromise their values because that single promotion means so much, and how they let go of that which should be cherished and loved.

Aarav the protagonist of the book will not stop at anything. He will do anything that is necessary, however flawed, to ascend the corporate hierarchy - he betrays his friends who are also his colleagues. He functions without scruples, cheats on his wife, humiliates her in the middle of a romantic trip to London without regret – all as a means to get to the top. There are elements in the book that are the obvious page turners – for instance what is Sonali up to? Will sleeping with sexy Sonali take Aarav to the top? What does she want from Aarav? Is she just using his ambitious streak to take him where he wants to be - provided he will do as she says?

Basu has written a fast-paced story with identifiable characterisation and a clear storyline, but of course these are inextricably woven with elements necessitated perhaps by the market formulae of the genre he has chosen, complete with "fervid, needy, even desperate love"...on the first page.

As with all such books, it could certainly do with some skilled editing. It is a reasonably well crafted tale, which like the corporate life that Basu describes, is written with the end in sight rather than the means. ■