

New fairy tales with a difference

**FABLES AND FANTASIES
FOR ADULTS** By Manoj Das;
Vision Books (Orient) 36C,
Connaught Place, New Delhi-1;
Pp 133; Rs 5.50.

MANOJ DAS being creator of modern fables and fantasies is somewhat different from other storytellers. He appears to have perfected a creative technique peculiarly responsive to the various levels of readership. His short stories are a delight for the lazy reader seeking merely to while away the time in the overcrowded railway carriage. For the more discriminating readership the same stories contain a penetrating satire which exposes the vulgar values we have somehow come to cherish over the ages.

That he should have dedicated his stories to "those unknown yarn-spinners of yore threads from whom have been spun into this stuff" is integral to the technique Das has perfected with such superb mastery. Generally he begins his stories with "Once upon a time, not long ago, a certain king had as his only child a most

beautiful princess....", a technique made immensely popular by grandmothers.

But this as we soon come to realise is merely a literary subterfuge. The storyteller, says Das, "is here because you chaps, bored of your stale jokes, were thirsting for some candid tales" One need not overemphasize the epithet candid. For it goes inevitably with those who seek to articulate concerns basic to humanity.

Das creates a string of modern Aesop fables, almost like the twentieth-century Panchatantra. His jackals and other animals assume modern roles which refreshingly give a rare touch of contemporaneity and also a haunting sense of some inexplicable inadequacy entrenched deep in the human fount.

As a storyteller Manoj Das has few rivals in the contemporary Indo-English world. An authentic storyteller, he is also a social critic of the first order.

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