

Editorial Preface

The Mahishasura Mardini of the Mahabalipuram caves is one of the great masterpieces of world art. Not a word has been written about the birth in the carving of conceptual art, of figures disclosing meaning through movement of the eye across the frieze, of the extraordinarily sacrilegious moment in which the scene is poised – for it is not clear who will be victor, Devi or Asura – the exhilarating attitude of her arched back while mounted on the Tiger – whatever immortal hand had carved his fearful symmetry –, arms prolonged to strike, or the demon’s randy little minions sprawling about the scene in Bacchic glee. Was this the work of a singular genius of Pallava extraction? Had a Greek master cast out of Bactria landed in a world of alien myths – and seen in severe Durga old tiring Artemis in fresh vigour? For all these questions we have no answer and all these emotions evoked in the work we have no confirmation – and worse, no culture of appreciation.

The failure of South Indian art to be counted among the great arts of the world is the fault of art criticism. A past so remote, a culture done over by conquest upon conquest, requires the mediation of a scriptor to relay its truths. Thus, Anukarsh this new year brings you its second issue to celebrate the unremarked yet eminently remarkable lineaments of South India’s artistic and cultural landscape. Given the lack, this is undoubtedly a modest contribution; but we hope through our bumbling efforts to suggest the students and academics reading this issue to share at given opportunities a chance thought or mazing memory from their wanderings beyond the ruined Deccan.

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