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INDIAN WORKS OF ART SERIES

VOLUME I

INDIAN SCULPTURE

IN BRONZE AND STONE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

GIUSEPPE TUCCI

20

MADANJEET PICTURES

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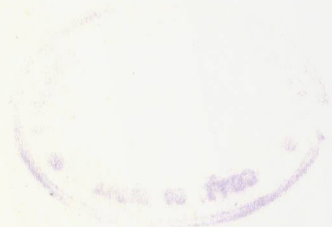


AMILCARE PIZZI ART REPRODUCTION - MILAN

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INDIAN ART HAS NOT YET, MET IN THE WEST WITH THE SAME FAVOUR as Chinese and Persian art. It has been widely discussed whether Hellenism, which reached the Indian borders with Alexander and his successors, has really influenced the Indian tradition.

Certain preciosities in Moghul painting, closely connected to that of Persia, are attracting the attention of critics and scholars who are making research in the inexhaustible wealth of Hindu and Buddhist mythography and take delight in iconographic subtleties, but one cannot really say that Indian art is easily understood or calls forth the admiration of the majority of Europeans.

The aesthetic appreciation of this art has not made much progress since Hawell tried for the first time to reveal the significance of some of its masterpieces, not merely as iconographic documents, but as expression of universal values of beauty. Laurence Binyon, with his marked sensitiveness, placed in an adequate light the fundamental

values of this art and, later, Coomaraswamy, with his unrivalled technical and historical knowledge, placed at scholars' disposal a wealth of documents, contributing by means of subtle research to define the fundamental moments and characteristics of Indian art, thus pointing out what influence it had in those countries where India's cultural and spiritual influence had spread.

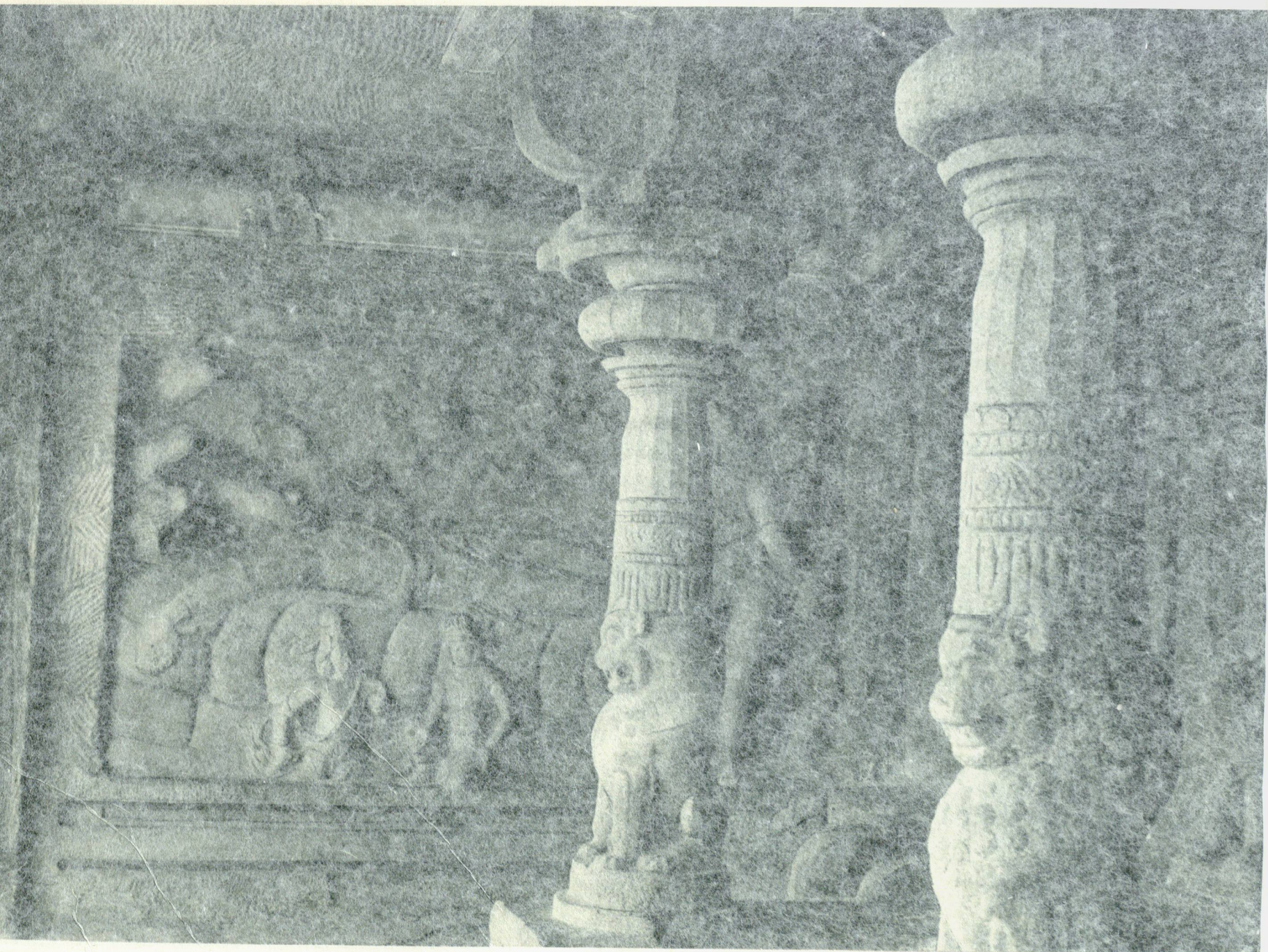
Indian art, in fact, has travelled throughout Asia, hand in hand with Buddhism and also with Hinduism, though to a smaller extent, taking with it the images of its Gods and the aesthetic ideals that India had elaborated, along with the formal embellishments, that contacts with other cultures was adding to it.

After crossing central Asia, where it caught the strain of the Greco-Roman and Iranian world, it crossed China, stopping a while along the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Then, sailing on southern seas, Indian art inspired the great monuments in Burma, Siam, Indo-China and Indonesia, leaving glorious footprints along its way, complex psychocosmogrammes, such as the architectural miracles in marble of Ankor and Borobodur. This art has had a steady development, down through the centuries or rather the millenniums, and its inspiration has not died out to this day.

After periods of torpor and weariness, during which its style and manner had stiffened into formal schemes, it recovered in the beginning of this century, creating new forms of beauty on the trace of models consecrated by an age-long aesthetic and religious tradition. Even nowadays, when different contrasting tendencies have penetrated India and Western ways are beginning to meet with favour and are sometimes re-elaborated with creative originality, as manifest in the cubism of Gogonendranath Tagore, still those ancient traditions are most vivid and fertile. It is from them, in fact, that some of the greatest contemporary artists, have drawn their inspiration.

This album, which has been arranged by Madanjeet Singh with so much taste and skill, shows types of sculpture of various epochs and sources, illustrating the expressions and essential characteristics of Indian plastic art. Though but few, they are sufficient to give one an idea of the fundamental features of an art that made its great

appearance with the celebrated dancer discovered at Mohen-jo Daro, lithesome in the composure of her movements and which later triumphed on the transepts of Sanchi and Bharhut with exquisite plastic figures, both singles and in groups, put together without undue attention to plans, but caught in their natural spontaneous attitude, with that sense of freedom, imitating the irrational and enthusiastic rapture of the free soul. Then, on this crowd of Gods and demigods stands out the figure of the Jainistic and Buddhistic ascetic, who personifies the ideal of the perfect man i.e. of man who, through his experiences dominates life and goes beyond it, conquering another plane, the nirvanic plane opposed to the changeable aspects of the becoming and of *mâyâ*.



These are the two poles, between which Indian plastic art fluctuates. On one side transhumanated man, symbol of a depersonalized truth and on the other, the disorderly exuberance of natural life of trees, animals and men; then, fluctuating between these two poles, with a foot in both worlds there is a host of gods and demigods, *yaksha* and *yakshini*, who are symbols of both the human and the divine.

Aside from those figures representing the perfect man, over and beyond good and evil, as reintegrated on the other plane, there is a restless vitality and an elementary movement animating and agitating the images of the Gods, generally reproduced, either in the very act of their creative impulse or in the tremendous struggles they are faced with, to vanquish evil forces, and that have inspired both the epic and puranic narratives or the mythographies, pictured on the temples dedicated to them.

A dance rhythm derives from all this, which dominates those figures, full of subtle significance, so subtle that their plastic representation may be said to be a symbology carried into effect, wherein the gestures of the Gods, the implements they are using or their masks are indicative of deep theological and mysterious philosophical implications.

In some statues this motive is so evident that they may be considered, above all, as plastic representations of motion. On one's mind flashes immediately the image of the dancing siva, a visible symbol of the universal dance rhythm, that awakens the worlds from the slumber of the archetypes, or annihilates them in a universal conflagration. And there is nothing strange in all this, because the Indian Gods are almost all a part of the cosmic creative plan not themselves the creators; an active projection of an absolute immovable conscience which transcends them and from which they alternatively emanate and are reabsorbed, once their work, assigned to them by the implacable laws of cosmic evolution and involution, has come to an end. They are forms, therefore, by means of which the secret mechanism of the universe is revealed to man, so that meditating on it, he may have at his disposal an easy means for overcoming the contradictions of the phenomenal becoming or may reacquire

the serenity of the soul perennially detached or dissolve, as a depersonalized identity, in that same consciousness, beyond which there is no truth.

But, then the excitement is calmed and the exultation or motion is extinguished in the fixity of the ecstasy of yoga that inspires the serene composure of the Buddha, intent on exploring, with half closed eyes the depth of the soul. On closer examination, furthermore, one discovers something more in these masterpieces of Indian sculpture; one notices; I would say, a blending of exuberant feminine forms and masculine strength or the tempering of the sexual differences, that are plastically expressed in Ardhanarisvara's type, which is significant of the compenetration of these two essential elements *saktiman* and *sakti*, possessor of power by means of which the rhythm of cosmic evolution, is developed.

Only in such a way does the invisible essence of the God *Prakriti* become *Vikrti*, i.e. it appears and develops in numberless forms of the universal becoming. In their initial state, however, these two aspects find a complete balance, as inert coexistence of opposites, which precedes the phenomenal dichotomy. Therefore that androgynous representation symbolize also the goal that an enlightened man will reach at the end of his long journey, his reintegration in the indifferentiated one and the recovered synthesis of opposites.

It is a fundamental idea, sometimes translated crudely with images coupled together, not infrequent in Buddhistic or, generally speaking, Tantric art, that would suggest, however, the same reintegration problem, through life's experience, of these two aspects, which being dissociated produce cosmic evolution, but uniting in the primordial one mark the recovery of lost consciousness.

I am not saying this because it is absolutely necessary to know this to understand Indian art; such a knowledge can, of course, help us to better grasp its hidden implications or to create in us a state of mind similar to that of the people who imagined or venerated those images. Only in an indirect way, however, will they influence the intrinsic evaluation of this art, that offers itself to our admiration for its harmonious

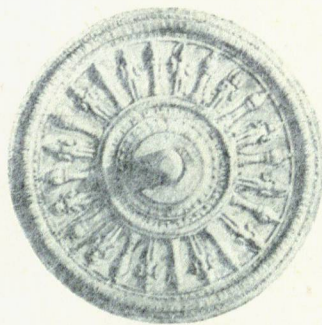
ensemble of almost bold vivacity, its play of light and shadow, alternating and reverberating on the roundness of the forms and the elasticity bending and twisting the figures so violently, that they do not seem to be images, but motion itself seized in its impetus and its immediate expression.

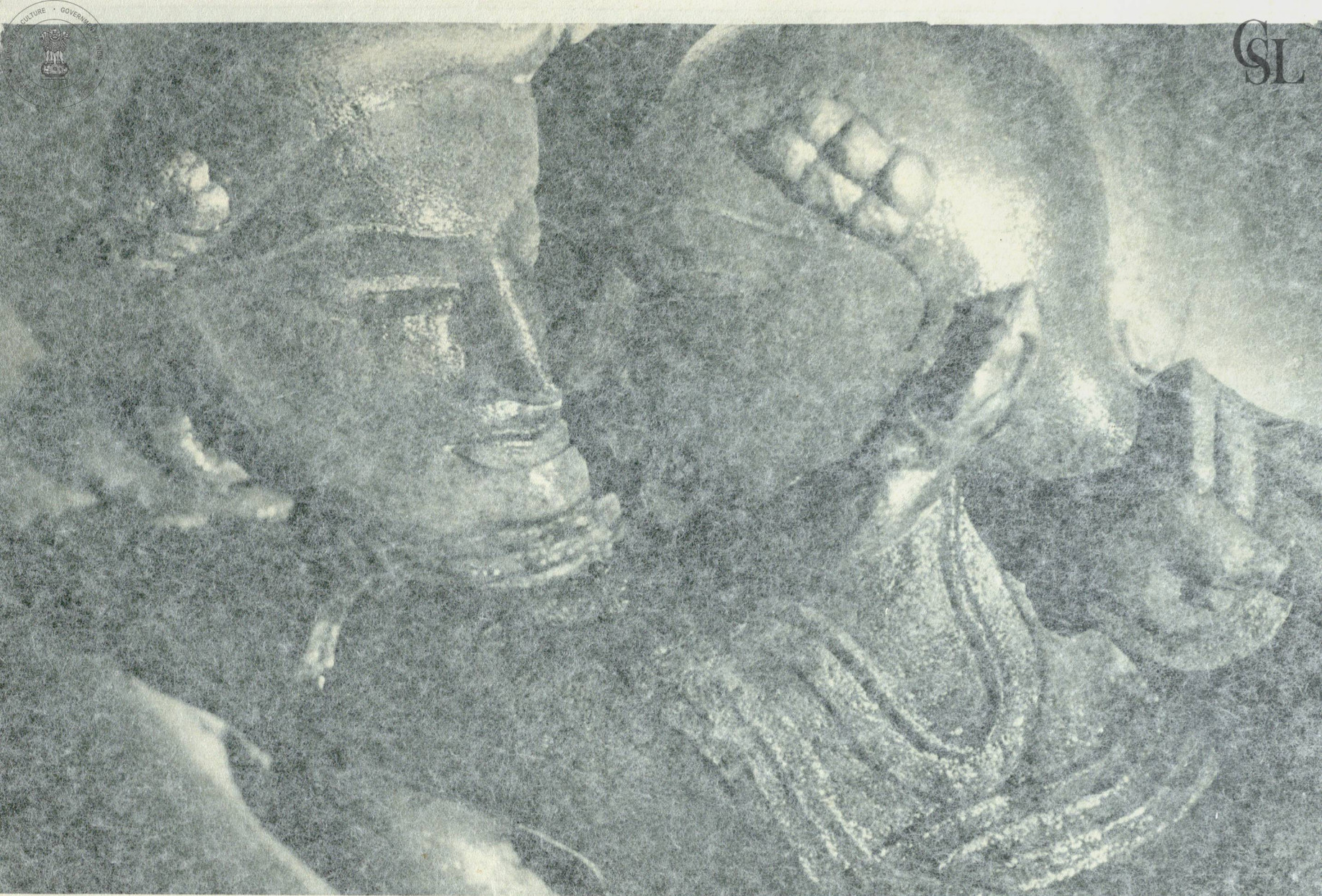
One cannot therefore criticize this art for its reluctance to copy the appearance of persons or objects or to reproduce, with classical accuracy the reality of things.

As throughout the Eastern World, the Indian artist has not imitated, nor has he made use of models, but he has freely thought over in his own mind the impression gathered, both from nature and from meditations of life. Hence, he does not portray what is a fixed, certain reality, drawn with painstaking care in all its smallest details, but rather he makes us hear the echo that reality has aroused in his fancy. The object reveals itself to him, in its ideal structure and in its inward essence, capable of producing particular emotions in his sensitive soul.

Thus, the 20 figures in this album, when looked at with understanding, will enable us to appreciate and admire those ideals of beauty, to which an age-long tradition has given form and which, once more, may teach us, by means of art symbols, how one-sided and incorrect therefore is Western opinion concerning Indian art. Just as her philosophy was only in a small degree ascetic, never denying the world's concreteness and life's reality, her art too, has not limited itself to the reproduction of the abstract type, yogin far from all human passion, but expresses also the fullness of life and the exultant joy of the whole creation.

GIUSEPPE TUCCI





THE SET OF PICTURES REPRODUCED IN THE VOLUME IS A SELECTION from the photographs made in the course of a tour, I undertook in India during the second half of the year 1949, in search of Indian works of art. Just as the aim of the tour was to pick out from among the vast panorama of sculptured panels and numerous bronze pieces, the typical and the outstanding representatives of Indian art, so also in the album no attempt is made to confine the subject to any particular historical period or age. But generally the works are of medieval period.

From among the sculptures which are printed for the first time, the portrait of *Siva* (Table III) depicts a forceful expression and an unusual strength of character; even

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in places a kind of grimacing agitation. The piece is in the decorative panel on the outer wall of a temple in Darasuram, south India, built in or about the 13th Century A. D., and, as it were, reflects the upheavals of the late Chola period that was passing into the Vijayanagara kingdom. The charming *Nati* (Table IX) in the great temple. Srirangam is another remarkable sculpture of a successful expression of an overwhelming modesty and unlike the *Apsaras* and *Nayikas* of Khajuraho (Tables I, IV, XI and XVIII) and Bhuvanesvara (Tables XVI and XX) where the celestial nymphs as well as the beauties of the earth are free and exorbitant in their love and wiles, in *Nati* the beauty is of silent and restrained expression, not knowing in her perplexity and embarrassment where to keep her hands or feet. The posture is in perfect harmony with the few and simple ornaments that adorn the figure thereby achieving a delightful balance between the emotional expression and the composition of the sculpture. The album also includes a few hitherto unpublished pictures of bas-reliefs on the pillars of a Mandapam in a temple in Kanchipuram (Tables XIV, XV, XVII and XIX) of whom the agile and nimble figure *Apsara* with a flexible bow (Table XIV and detail in Table XV) is obviously derived from the *Bharat Natayam's* classical dance poses which were earlier created in the famous *Nataraja* temple in Chidambaram. The composition reflects the circular bias in Indian art compositions that was inextricably bound with the aesthetic concepts of the medieval period. Similarly *Nayika* (Table XVII) and *Nartaki* (Table XIX) are interesting artistic compositions based on circles and waves where inspite of the absence of anatomical details (or perhaps for that reason) there is in them a strange harmony of limbs and movements.

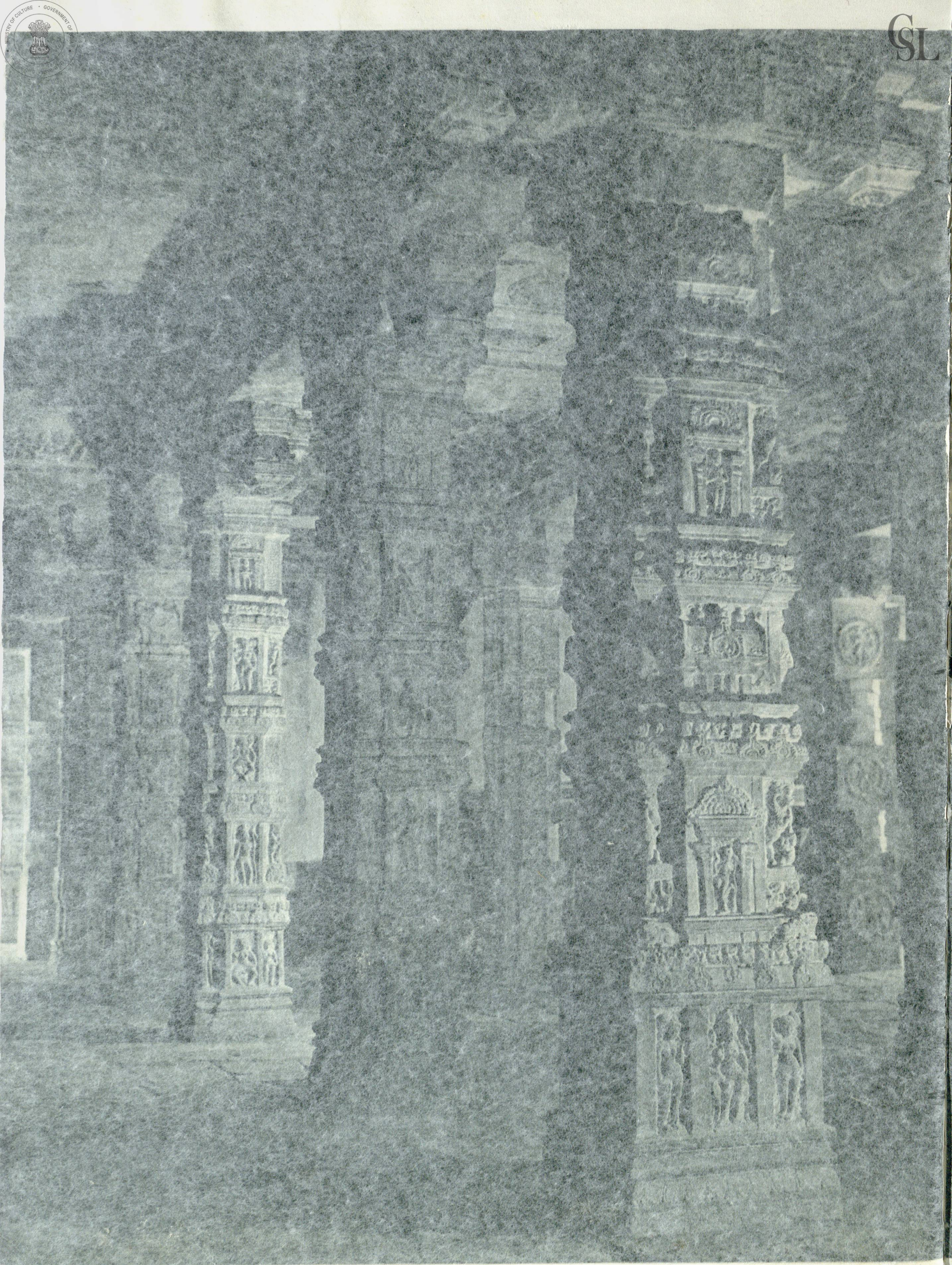
With regards to the bronzes, contrasted with the known classical works such as the graceful *Chola Rani* (Table II) and the elegant figure *Avalokitesvara* from Kurkihar (Table V), the album includes an exceptional bronze *Upasaka* (Table XII) visualizing an unconventional expression in form and volume that is so rare in the works of preceding centuries when stress was laid on slim forms as can be seen in *Krishna*

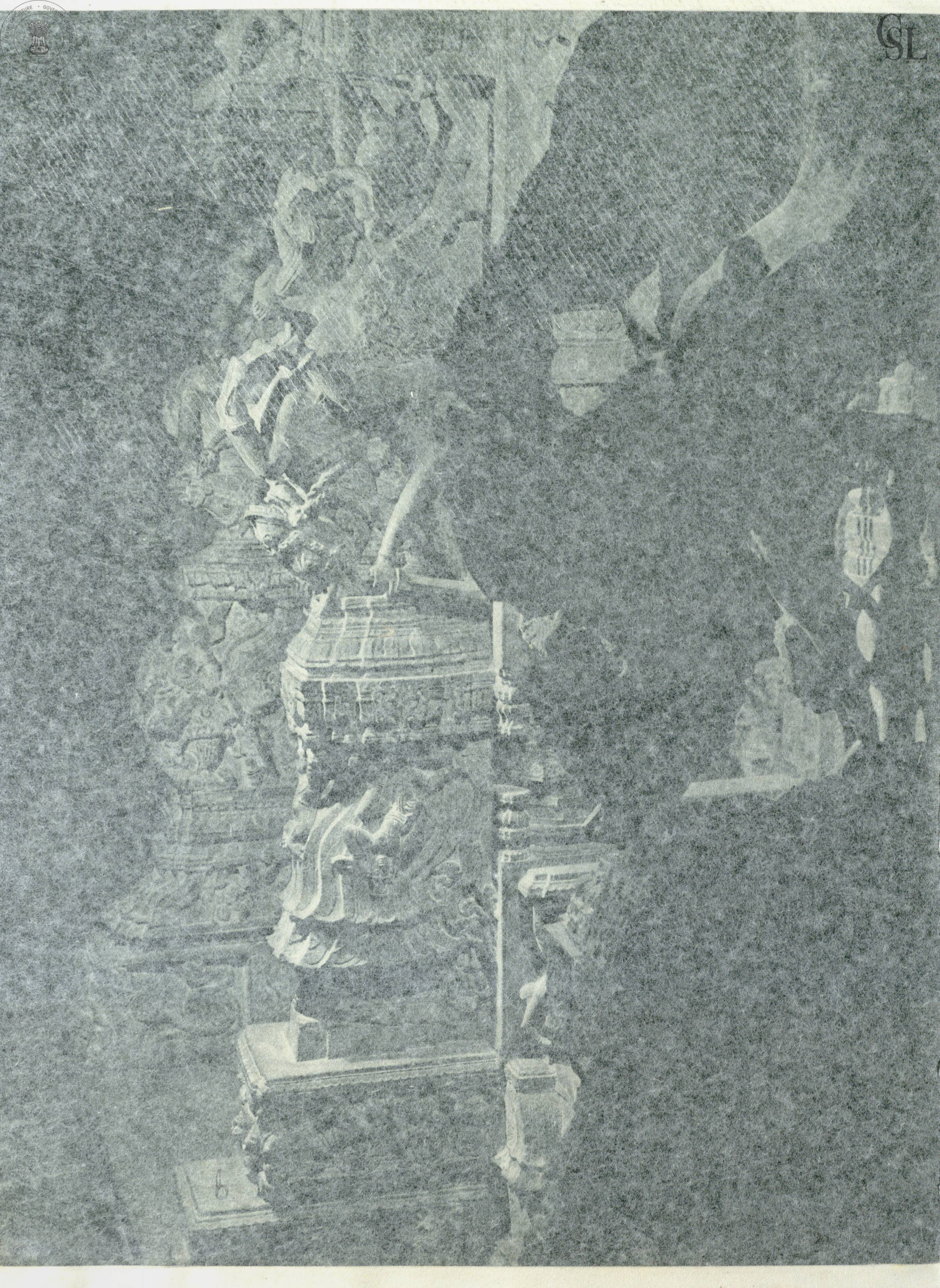
(Table XIII) and *Paravati* (Table VIII). The figure of *Sita* (Table VI) also deserves special attention as it is treated with the delicacy of execution so characteristic in the works of the unknown masters of ancient India.

The Indian works of art, however, cannot be truly appreciated if they are considered in isolation with the moral and universal values of peace and compassion of which they were a natural corollary. Like all great works of art, they have created archetypes and symbols that have helped in the cohesion and solidarity of society and have, therefore, served as a most effective guidance for the individual in selecting the values of life. It implies an attitude as rare in life as in art in which spiritual and social obligations are so intimately interwoven that instead of conflicting they mutually intensify their effects and it is due to this, perhaps, that the Indian genius attained the self expression in the language of sculptures reproduced herein.

MADANJEET SINGH







PLATES

