

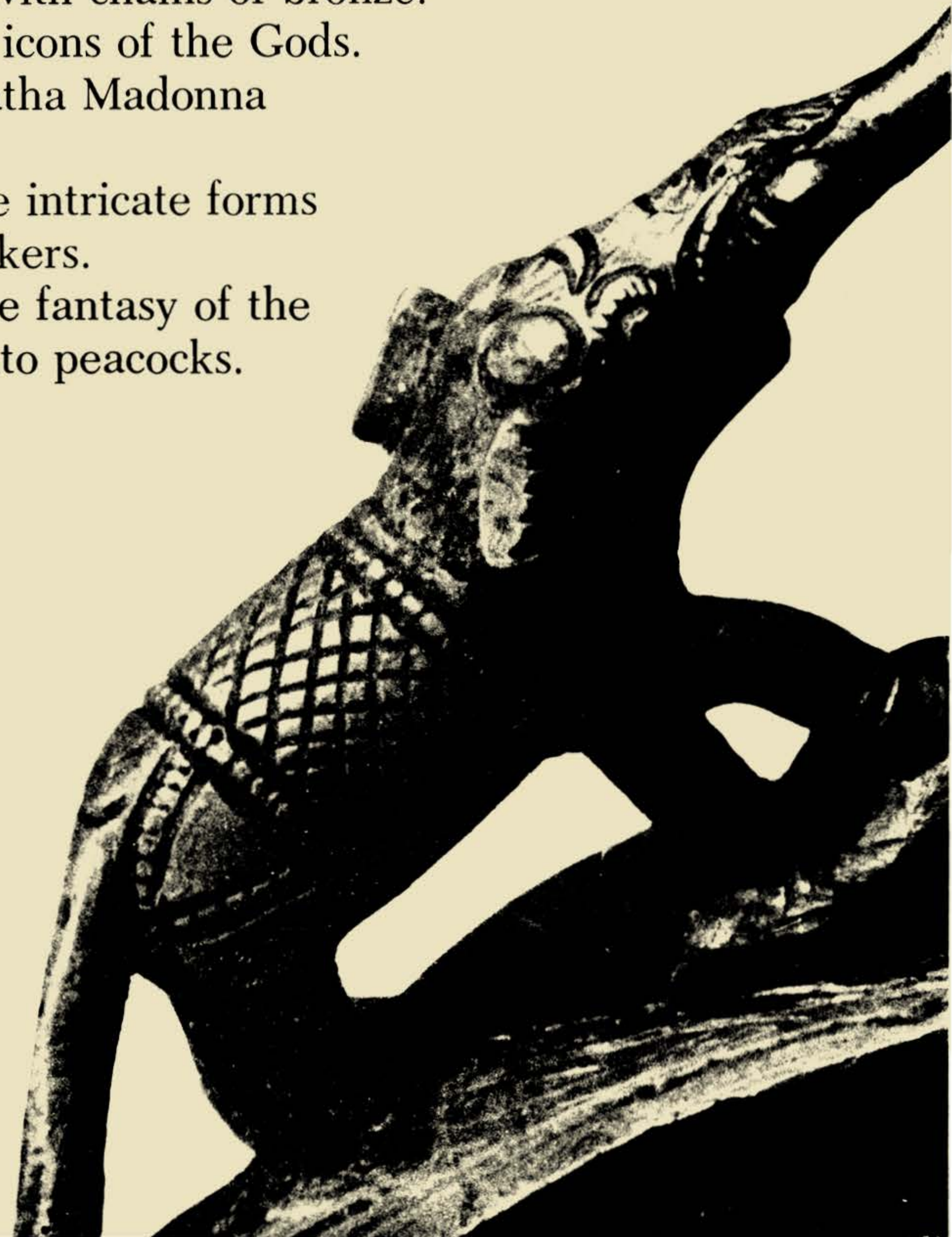
# Homage to Dinkar Kelkar

A great little man!  
— that is the spontaneous exclamation which comes from us  
when we see the 83-year-old young man,  
Dinkar Kelkar,  
come up from within the inner sanctum  
of his museum.

It is the natural wish of every visitor,  
who goes through the fantastic 'wonder house',  
in which one room opens into another and insinuates itself  
into a third in a sur-realist composition,  
to see the maker of this dreamworld.

We have passed through  
the carved doors of old houses.  
We have seen the carved projections of windows.  
We have noticed the elaborate  
mandala-like *divas* of brass,  
and the hanging oil lamps with chains of bronze.  
We have contemplated the icons of the Gods.  
We have admired the Maratha Madonna  
with the child.  
We have been dazed by the intricate forms  
of the hundreds of nut-crackers.  
We have been struck by the fantasy of the  
elaborate Veenas turned into peacocks.

1. A dramatic detail of Gajalakshmi lamp being bathed by two elephants.  
South India, c. early 20th century.



We have been overwhelmed by the proliferation of forms  
that Dinkar Kelkar has collected from the villages,  
the small towns and obscure settlements  
of tribal people of our country.

We are told that he has done it all,  
single-handed,  
by travelling thousands of miles,  
with the persistence of a humble searcher,  
the devotion of a *bhakta*,  
and the unerring eye of a connoisseur of novelty in forms.  
And we join hands to him in worship.

He is a modest little man.  
His light frame, clad simply in kurta-dhoti,  
is vibrant even at his advanced age,  
as he leads you to a new acquisition.  
His eyes light up with joy  
at his own discoveries.



He mutters the name of the place  
where he found a particular Durga.  
Impetuously, he shows another figurine in clay  
which he picked up in some fair.  
And before we have taken the object in,  
he points to a wild toy horse  
brought from a ruined palace nursery.  
Seeing the sense of wonder in our eyes,  
he sits us down on a carved settee,  
brought from some old Parsi home.  
And while a furtive movement  
brings his demure, kindly and gentle spouse  
with cups of tea and something to eat,  
he opens a packet of Paithan Paintings of *Ramayana*,  
in which we recognise the puppet shapes of Andhra  
transformed by the Maharashtrian craftsmen  
into a sturdy Rama  
and more than demoniac Ravana and a gazelle-like Sita.  
Before we have finished absorbing this set,  
he shows us a vision in glass painting  
of the lovely Mastani Begum  
done in the Karnatak style.  
As we wish to absorb all that we have seen,  
we stop looking, drink the tea and ask the question  
which everyone asks:

‘How did you get all these things?’

He evades the answer and says:  
‘I have a free Railway Pass.  
I am going to Kutch tomorrow  
— next Friday, I will be in Hyderabad.  
At the end of the week, I shall be in Tamil Nadu.  
Back home in a truck,  
which is being sent by a generous patron!’

We come away bent-headed,  
with love and admiration for him in our hearts.

And, in retrospect, we feel reassured that,  
in spite of the restless, grasping, unhappy world around us  
there is, in our midst,  
a haven where this pioneer, and ardent pilgrim,  
Dinkar Kelkar, has ‘shored the remnants’ of our people’s culture  
against our ruin —  
in one of the richest museums of folk art in the world.

