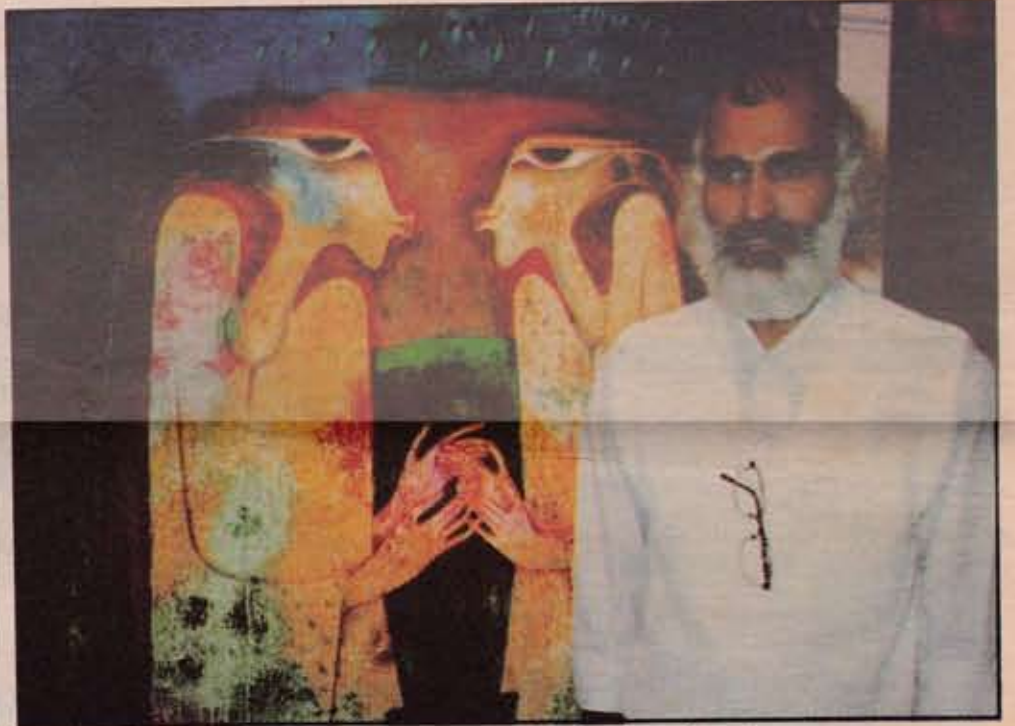


Togetherness is Joy expounds the artist's stand on love.



Syed Thajudeen . . . wants to be closer to god.

A master-craftsman of his art

By J ANU

Syed Thajudeen's paintings are very mystical in the careful rendering of essentially flat, illuminated, monumental figures that interact with each other.

Syed Thajudeen's paintings spotlight two main elements — the depiction of scenes from epics and history and an exploration of his personal views on various issues.

His *Ramayana* and *Malacca Sultanate* series are masterly mural-like attempts to trace the grandeur of momentous events. Each series comprises three monumental pieces measuring 27 feet by 5 feet.

"These epics are universal sagas of good over evil. They transcend all religious or racial boundaries. They are first and foremost items of beauty that extol the virtues of strength, piety, honour and glory."

While studying art in India, Syed Thajudeen drew inspiration from the cultures, religions, landscapes and architectures of ancient India.

"Travelling through India is like exploring 10 different countries . . . there are endless kinds of peoples, cultures, geographies and even food."

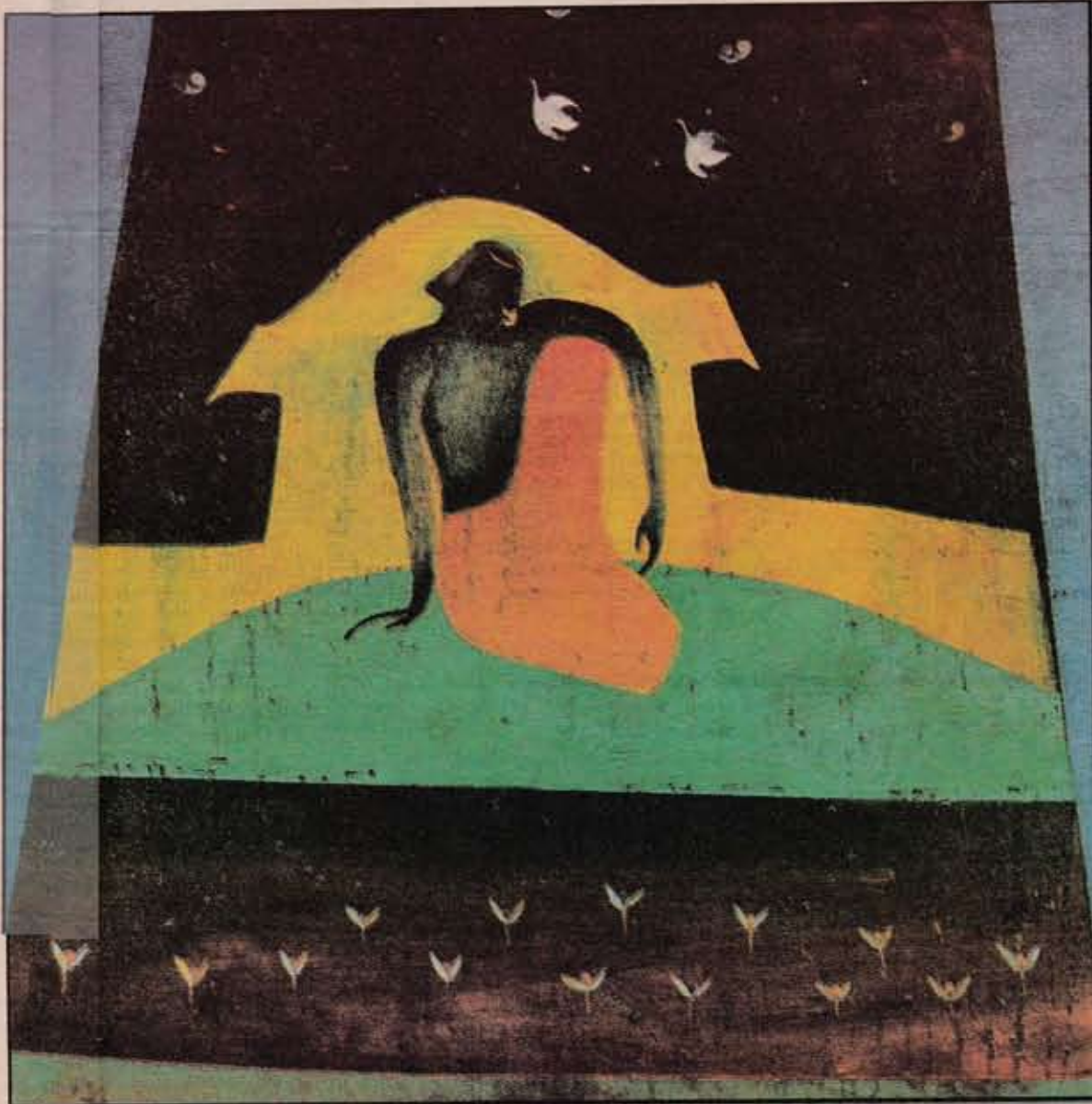
The constant barrage of images, smells, taste and sounds has provided the artist with a wealth of references he stores and uses when painting.

Most of his figures are adapted from Moghul art as can be seen in his unchanging depictions of the human face in profile. Though the body itself is presented in various perspectives the faces are intentionally two dimensional.

The cave paintings of Ajanta, in particular, started his trend of painting on canvasses in a deep passionate palette of mysterious tropical blues, alizarins, purples and greens.

Chalky white streaks punctuate and kindle his strange figures in epics steeped in folk-lore and mythology.

Although somewhat two dimensional at a glance, the spec-



Meeting of the Eyes is an example of Syed Thajudeen's earlier works

tacular colour contrasts he employs, help the forms to really emerge and visually lunge at the viewer.

The use of colour in pieces like *Meeting of the Eyes* creates that element of spirituality that seems to prevail in most of his works.

The painting features four distinct planes that set the stage for the figure slouched in lethargic ennui.

These planes containing the slope and the house-like structure are like echoes that eventu-

ally lead up to the solid black back-drop of the night.

The cobalt archway actually draws the viewer into the painting, making him an actual participant of the entire composition. The overall impact is awesome.

The backgrounds lean towards colourful motifs in repeat, sometimes peacock coloured raindrops or wave-like clouds or snowy-white doves . . . sometimes flora presented in stylised V-shapes. (*Meeting of the Eyes*)

This results in an effect which although decorative, remains

complimentary rather than frivolous.

Pieces like *Meeting of the Eyes* and the *Ramadhan* series move away slightly from Syed Thajudeen's previous obsession with the pictorial narrative but nevertheless constantly address issues of tradition and culture.

Today, the artist has another obsession. Less dramatic but just as powerful, he sees Love as the core element of his artistic message.

"A love for God, a love for your fellow man, a love for nature.

The different kinds of love . . . mother and son, man and woman, husband and wife — the list is endless."

Spiritualism not in its historical context but rather of a personal perspective is another feature of the newer work.

Syed Thajudeen sees age as a factor in bringing one closer to God.

Interestingly enough, Syed Thajudeen is currently showing a collection of his ink drawings that envelop the rituals of love in an aura of spirituality. The works are at the Art Salon in Kuala Lumpur.

"These drawings typify the early studies of my Love series. Rather than something like the *Ramayana* pieces which were full of a darker joy these are my happy images."

These pieces are not only a visual celebration of Love but they are a literal tribute to the Creator of Syed Thajudeen's world.

Intricate lines weave and scratch, unfolding an ink and paper world of those familiar human profiles amidst environments that are fantastically decorative and elaborately beautiful.

Similar elements of perspective, tones and motif exist as in his painted works. However, a self-indulgent eye for detail and a laborious execution of line make for some new elements in old imagery.

The artist creates environments that hang nowhere, like the house in *Looking out to the World* . . . an ideal world where the woman sits in the ornate surroundings of humanity, while the animals frolic (literally), in austere playgrounds of wide open paper.

A hint of everything manifests itself in the mesh of fine lines that make up *Togetherness is Joy*. Birds, snakes and the suggestion of an alligator seem to live in the dense tones of line that exist behind the pair of deer.

Yet there is a sense of general harmony that dominates the image.

It is exciting to witness the early stages of an artist's work process. To call them preliminary studies tend to trivialise works that seem to stand so well on their own.

Syed Thajudeen remains a master-craftsman of his art.