

THAJUDEEN ... master craftsman of his art.

Peace and joy through paintings

“The imagery is universal. It transcends all religious or racial boundaries. They are first and foremost things of beauty that extol the virtues of strength, piety, honour and glory.”

— Syed Thajudeen

By J. ANU

And all in epic scale. Rendered in the same grand measure, Syed Thajudeen's *Ramadhan Series* is not simply about Ramadhan.

While the works remain inspired by the artist's deep-rooted faith in his religion and the pre-occupation with his Malaysian identity, various other elements are undeniable.

Like his obsession with all things magnificent . . .

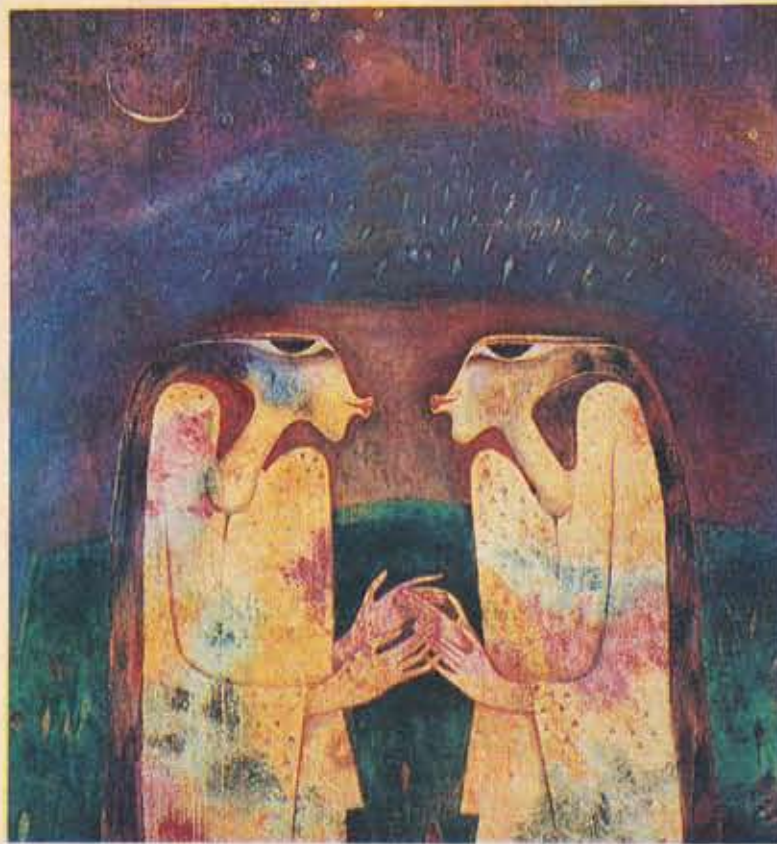
Or the absorbed influence of his Indian art education on his aesthetics and his sense of values and spirituality . . .

Or his reverence for the artisan's tools . . .

And of course, the undeniable mastery of his art.

While the figurative motifs in pieces like *Submission*, *Maaf Zahir dan Batin* or *Moon of Ramadhan* may find their beginnings in the profiled figurism of Moghul art and the textures of the cave paintings of Ajanta, the use of colour, composition and personal references make the work all his own.

Far from the earthy hues associated with cave paintings, Tha-



MERGING CULTURE WITH RELIGION ... Maaf Zahir dan Batin merges elements of a Malaysian culture within a religious context.

juddeen's canvasses are streaked with a luminous palette of the most spirited and vivid blues, alizarins, reds and yellows that are more ochre, but retain the sparkle of primary yellow.

The result is the streaky landscape of hue that is reminiscent of the textures of a cave wall but in the most improbable of primary pigment.

Thajudeen's obsession with Ramadhan is seen in the various renditions he has executed in the last two decades.

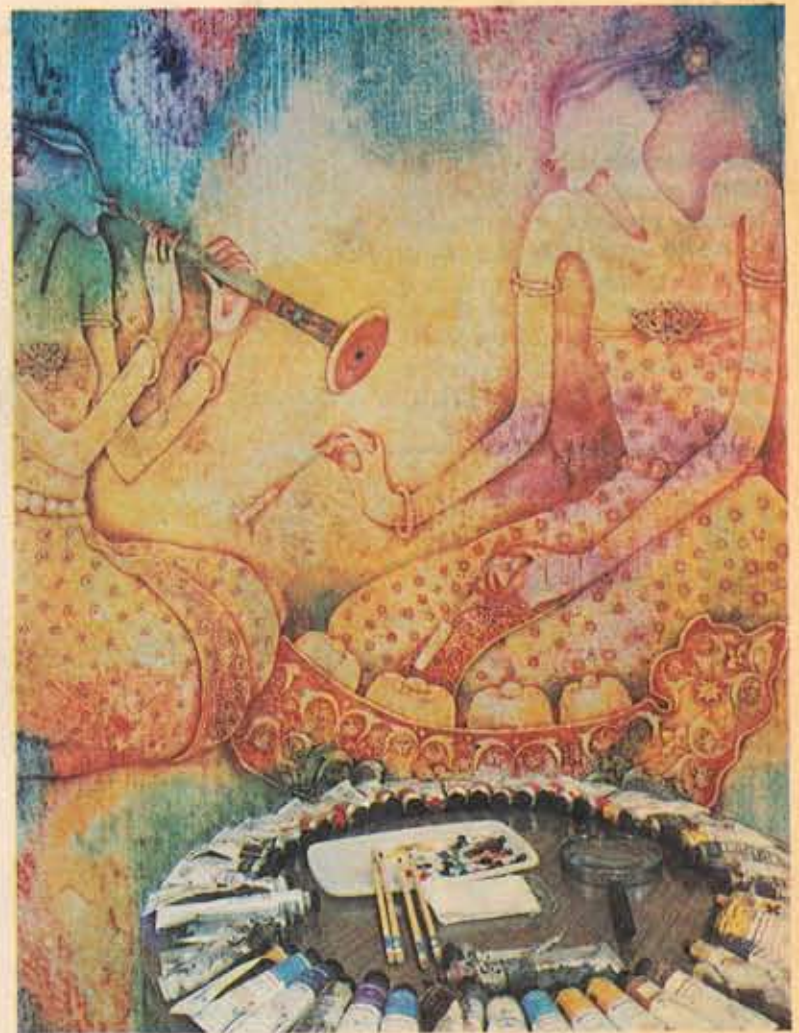
Compared to the earlier pieces which were painted in thick, layered paint giving it a more dark, somber aura, the recent works — *Submission*, *Maaf Zahir dan Batin* and *Moon of Ramadhan* — have an airy lightness of touch that evokes different emotions from the viewer.

“What I want now is for the paintings to bring peace in their gesture and joy and happiness in their colour. Like many other artists I, too, went through my times of turmoil and that was my dark period,” he said with a smile. “Today I am at peace with myself, my fellow man and my Maker.”

Moon of Ramadhan plays on the significance of the moon. The ambience of the piece recreates romanticised references to the night in the month of revelation when the angel Gabriel woke Mohammed from his slumber.

As the Prophet awoke he glimpsed the moon shining through the crevasses of Mount Hira and the angel Gabriel emanating from therein.

The figures in *Moon* seem to



PAYING TRIBUTE ... a reverential treatment of the artist's tools.



PLAYING ON MOON'S SIGNIFICANCE ... the male figure in *Moon of Ramadhan* seems to be telling the tale of the prophet.

cluster in the story, the male — presumably father — telling the tale of the prophet as they sight the moon.

Maaf Zahir dan Batin seems to merge various elements of a Malaysian culture within a religious context.

And *Submission* is an obvious reflection of the artist's personal relationship with his God and the concept of prayer which forms an integral part of Islam.

The artist manages to convey a constant spirituality not only through his imagery but his very way of life.

His house is minimalist in the extreme and the humility of the man is testified by the only objects that adorn his walls; a collection of fabulous Quranic Miniatures.

His “studio” is simply the

painting he is working on, a rocking chair that beckons and his tray of paints.

Tubes of paint are colour coded in a pristine circle that ring brushes, palette and magnifying glass in what seems to be an oracle — almost like the artist's tribute to and respect for his tool.

Although collectors criticise Thajudeen for not being prolific enough in creating new paintings, the artist himself is unapologetic.

“Painting is the essence of my life . . . I am not a slave to commercialism. I am not painting simply to sell . . . in many ways it is my labour of love.”

In his current works which find their inspiration in love and music as in the *Ramadhan Series*, Thajudeen remains a mas craftsman.