

TEEN S and TWENTIES

A Tribute To Charlie Chaplin

by Kazi Golam Towsif

"**C**HARLIE Chaplin, the little tramp with cane and comic walk almost single-handedly elevated the entertainment medium of motion pictures into art, died peacefully yesterday at his home in Switzerland. He was 88 years old." This was the obituary news in The New York Times on 26 December 1976, announcing the death of Sir Charles Spencer Chaplin.

Life for Charlie Chaplin was never easy. But he had to live

"It was owing to her vocal condition that at the age of 5, I made my first appearance on the stage", Chaplin wrote.

No other motion picture actor captured and enthralled the world as Charlie Chaplin did. He became an immortal artist as he successfully portrayed a unique character. In more than 80 movies from 1914 to 1967, he (by the way, he was a writer, director as well as an actor) took the role of the little fellow capriciously knocked about fac-

Dictator" and "Monsieur Verdoux". "The human race I prefer to think of as the underworld of the gods", he said. "When the gods go slumming they visit the earth". Ridiculing thus, folly Chaplin displayed a basic affection for the human race. He was serious and jocular at the same time, and it was this blend of attitudes that elevated his comedy beyond slapstick to a realm of craftsmanship.

Rebounding from Adversity

A sombre theme in "The Gold Rush", for example, is about man's inhumanity to man. The comedy arises from the hero's adversity, illustrated by his eating of his shoe. The element of contrast exemplified by that scene was at the root of Chaplin's comedy. This sense of comedy tickled the fancy of millions of viewers for half a century.

The little tramp, the comedy character that lifted its creator to perpetual fame, was neatly dressed in baggy trousers, huge shoes, and a sporty bamboo cane. A jet-black mustache completed the costume. What made it all fit together was that it complemented Chaplin's slight gesture — he was 5 feet 4 inches tall, he weighed about 130 lbs in his prime years.

He was told to wear something funny, and he put on a grab-bag basis from other members of the company, pants belonging to Fatty Arbuckle, size 14 shoes each placed on the wrong foot, a tight coat, a colleague's derby, a prop cane, and a false moustache that he cut down to fit his face. With a few exceptions, Chaplin used this setup for about 25 years, and it was his symbol for a lifetime. The artistry with which it was employed, of course, showed that the Little Tramp of "Modern Times" was a far more complex character than that in "Kid Auto Races at Venice".

The explanation for this was the meticulousness with which Chaplin studied the structure of comedy, with the intention of making audiences laugh.

Desperately Serious

"All my pictures are built around the idea of getting me into trouble and so giving me a chance to be desperately serious in my attempt to appear as a normal little gentleman", he wrote early in his Hollywood career, adding, "That is why no matter how desperate the predicament is, I am always very much earnest about clutching my cane, straightening my derby hat and fixing my tie, even though I have just landed my head."

One of Chaplin's basic routines had to do with dignity,

"Even funnier than the man who has been ridiculed is the man who, having had something funny happen to him, refuses to admit that anything out of the way has happened, and attempts to maintain his dignity", he wrote in 1918.

A Train of Possibilities

Some of Chaplin's best comic situations resulting from his keen-eyed observation of

lines. I stored these points away in my mind and some time later, when I made The Fireman, I used everyone of them".

Added to Chaplin's talent for perceiving comic potential in everyday occurrences was his skill at using contrast. "Contrast spells interest", he once remarked. "If I am being chased by a policeman, I always make the policeman seem heavy and

ers, this form of body language permitted the actor to be readily understood by people everywhere. Indeed after only two years on the screen, he was unquestionably the top figure in motion picture industry. Demand for his pictures was phenomenal. For example, one New York theatre played his films continuously from 1914 to 1923, stopping only because the building burned down.

Some notion of adulation of the actor may be inferred from the response to his bond tours during World War I — crowds of 30,000 in New York, 65,000 in Washington, 40,000 in New Orleans. Going to Europe in 1921 — "The Tramp", "Shoulder Arms" and other of his classics had of course preceded him — Chaplin was mobbed in London and Paris. The latter city announced a public holiday for the premiere of "The Kid". Few men in this century in any field attained his stature with the public.

At the same time, Chaplin widened his out look of social world, meeting and becoming friendly with Max Eastman, the radical writer; James M Barrie, the British playwright; H G Wells. Throughout his life, he enjoyed the shuttlecock of wits with bright and learned men and women.

This tendency of him is exemplified in founding his own film company too. Chaplin's later films were made for "United Artists", a company he founded with three friends who by that time became legends in Hollywood — D W Griffith, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks. Chaplin's initial film for this concern was "A Woman of Paris", a comedy of manners that he produced and directed without starring in it.

"The Gold Rush", the picture with which he wanted to be remembered by, came out in 1925 and it once again confirmed his support of the public. Less successful with the critics was "The Circus", which opened in 1928. It seemed to lack the feeling of "The Gold Rush", and its comedy twists were short of flair. Starting work on "City Lights" in 1928, the actor faced a crisis in the advent of talkies. He was fearful that spoken dialogue would impair the character of The Tramp, cause difficulties in his reliance on pantomime and cut into foreign sales. Moreover, many of Chaplin's effects had been achieved by under-cranking the camera, a feat impossible at the speed of a motor driven sound camera.

Reputation as Radical

The picture's appeal was one factor in Chaplin's conquering tour to Europe and the Orient —

a whirl of meeting with statesmen, writers, artists and celebrities. Returning to Hollywood, he embarked upon "Modern Times", a satire on mass production, which at the time gave the actor a reputation as a "Radical". "It (the picture) started from an abstract idea, an impulse to say something about the way life is being stardised men turned into machines and the way I felt about it", he said of his witty social parable. The Little Tramp disappeared with "Modern Times",

many conservatives. Chaplin's life "is detrimental to the moral fabric of America", John Rankin a right wing legislator from Mississippi noted. Finally, in 1952, the actor, a British subject, was exiled by the United States. While he was sailing to Britain, the Attorney General of US announced that he could not re-enter the country unless he could prove his "moral worth". Piqued Chaplin spent rest of his life in Europe, setting on a 38 acre estate at Vevey, Switzerland.



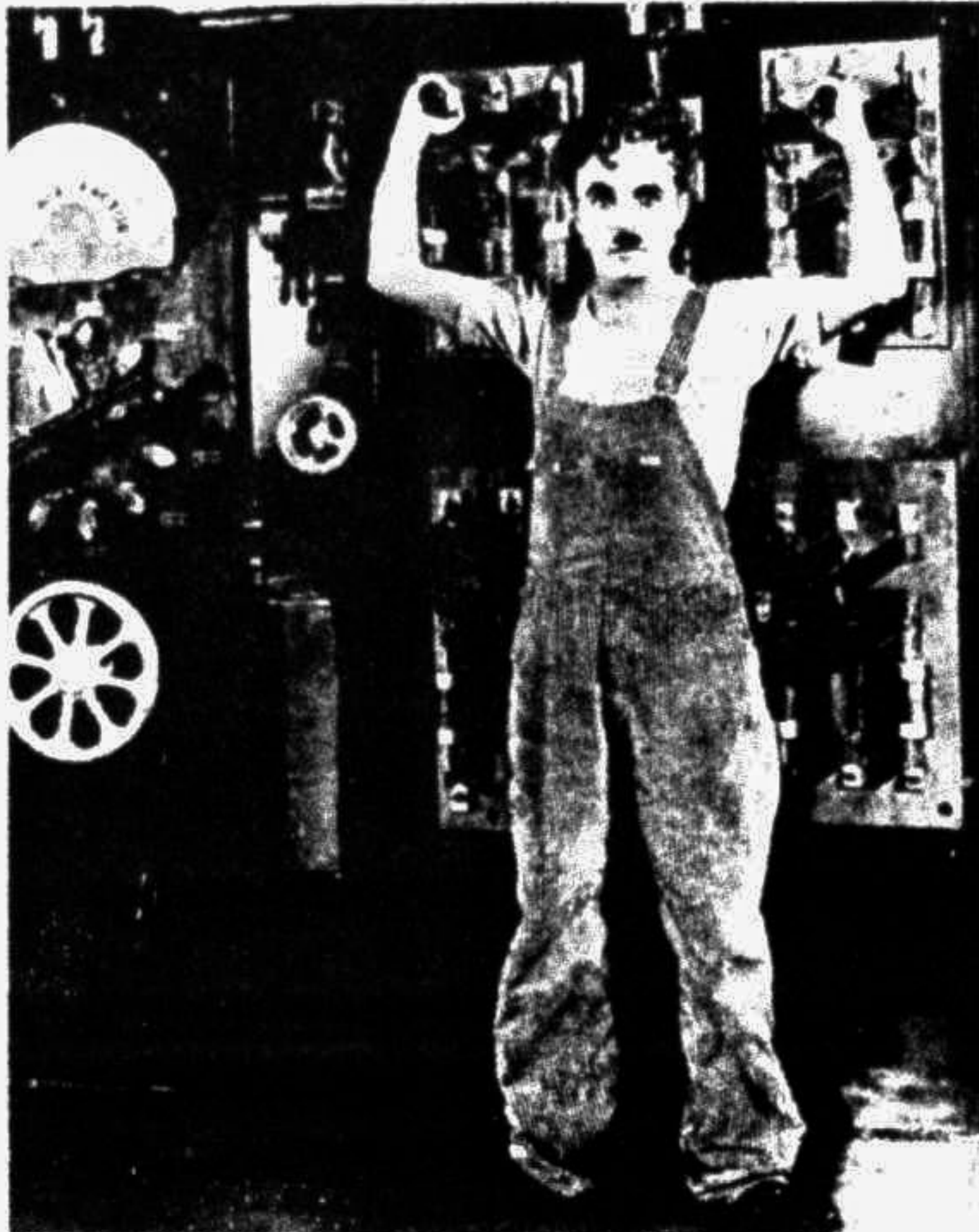
Chaplin as 'The Great Dictator' (1940)

that life. The determination he possessed did not admit of defeat. "You have to believe in yourself — that's the secret", he once advised his son Charles Jr. Born 16 April 1889, in South London, Charlie Chaplin was the son of a vaudeville and a music hall soubrette, whose stage name was Lilly Harley. By an earlier union, Chaplin's mother Hannah, had a son, Sydney, four years older than him. Sydney was to become his half-brother's business manager. After Chaplin's parents were separated, Mrs Chaplin was able to support herself. But her voice lost its quality. And

ing reality, but not so utterly battered that he sank in the ocean of despair. Rather, there would be hope in him that would drive him forward.

His role in Everyman and the Little Tramp was that of a clown, a social outcast, and even a philosopher. Chaplin's Everyman he always managed to maintain his dignity and self-respect. There was pathos to the Little Tramp, yet he never wanted to be pitied.

The essence of Chaplin's humour was satire, sometimes very subtle as in "The Kid" and "The Gold Rush", and sometimes acerbic as in "The Great



Charlie Chaplin in 'Modern Times' (1936)

life around him. "I watch people inside a theatre to see when they laugh, I watch them everywhere to get material which they can laugh at", he explained. "I was passing a firehouse one day", he went on, "and heard a fire alarm ring. I watched the man sliding down a pole, climbing onto the engine and rushing off to the fire."

"At once a 'train of comic possibilities' occurred to me. I saw myself sleeping in bed, oblivious to the clanging of the fire bell. This point would have had universal appeal, because everyone like to sleep. I saw myself sliding down the pole, playing tricks with the fire horses, rescuing my heroine, falling of the fire engine as it turned a corner, and many other points along the same

clumsy while, by crawling through his legs, I appear light and acrobatic. If I am being treated harshly, it is always a big man who is doing it, so that, by contrasting between the big and the little, I get sympathy of the audience, and always I try to contrast my seriousness of manner with ridiculousness of the incident," Chaplin noted.

Affection and Adulation

"I am known in the parts of the world by people who have never heard of Jesus Christ", Chaplin said matter-of-factly early in his career. Entering motion pictures in what was the medium's infancy Chaplin was obliged to rely on situational comedy and pantomime, the use of mute gestures and facial expressions to convey emotion. Transcending linguistic barriers,



Chaplin in 'A dog's life' (1918)

and with "The Great Dictator" Chaplin joined the sound picture ranks. A feral ridicule of Hitler and Mussolini, the film has grown in stature over the years as its political applications have been, according to critics, "I want to see the return of decency and kindness", Chaplin said at the time. "I am just a human being who wants to see this country a real democracy."

Despite "The Great Dictator", the 1940s were difficult years for Chaplin. His wartime speeches calling for a Western second front in assistance for Stalin to crush Hitler irked

A Special Academy Award
In 1972, however retribution of a sort was made to Chaplin. He visited the United States to receive a Special Oscar from the American Motion Picture Academy and accolades in New York. By this time the once-bubbling actor aged into senility.

He could little more than bow and smile in response to expressions of affection for him and his art. In his declining years Chaplin looked back with happiness on his early days in the movies. "I was able to try anything in those days", he said, "I was free."

The Fairy-Tale World Of BTV Dramas

by Muneera Parveen

ILLUSIONS are never too healthy. At least I think so. Yet such a huge sector of us live in and among illusions. Some are perhaps tolerable to an extent, some are explainable to a certain extent but some are so much wrapped up in illusions and the like that it is not even possible to wake them up, they are totally wrapped up in their own world.

Our people at BTV are one such sector. Especially those who write, direct and create TV dramas. They live in a world of illusions and make believe — I think — or where else do they come up with such melodramas to present to us all round the year, so many times a week?

Most of you must be familiar with our so-very-talked-of TV dramas I suppose. If you aren't yet, all you have to do is to switch on the set between 8-40pm — 10.00pm am, preferably, Mondays or Fridays. It presents 1 hour 20 minutes of hilarious entertainment. If you have a knacky sense of humour like I do, you will set through tolerably well entertained (though perhaps not quite in the way the defector had wished you to be). Else you may quite end up tearing out your own hair, or so stunned that ... well you will be too stunned to say it anyway?

Hypothetical societies, hypothetical social and moral values, hypothetical situations are all in. The problem is with this experimental hypothesis. Whether they might ever occur during the course of our normal lives is something no one stops to think of. Well, so much so far basis intelligence.

Okay so, in order to make the plot as interesting as possible, the dramatist brings in as many problems — as surprises to the audience — as possible. So the plot thickens to such an extent that soon he realises that nothing less than the patent efforts of Scully and Mulder, can undo the variety of knots in the story — so instead, he brings in the SUPRISE ELEMENT, which is always the best alternative. So leaving you as surprised as heaven knows what, the drama ends, leaving a cloud of confusion among the citizens at the country.

Lets take a look at this one drama for instance. This was cured in late last year and starred two hearts of the small screen — the evergreen Alzal Hossain and Model Mou. People slathered enthusiastically around their idiot boxes (and

boys how idiotic they later left for a good product at last, or so they thought. The plot was plain. A young widowed gentleman (Alzal) leaving with his beloved, only kid daughter and an undying love for his late wife. His love for his only daughter knows no bounds and comes a glamorous young lady into his office — in a lace saree and sleeveless blouse, and begs for a job. He offers her a job as a governess in his house, and although his love for his daughter is emphasised in the drama, he asks for no references or experience or qualifications from this glamorous looking young thing with 2 inch thick pancake makeup on her face, (hint enough?)

So she steps into his house, empty handed — or so the viewers saw and starts her job. No one bats an eyelid as to the impropriety of to such a young woman coming to live in the house of a single gentleman, but then this is the world of BTV

make-believe. So she comes into his (Alzal's) life and takes charge, in a variety of trendy clothes (all the latest mods) and matching accessories — (Remember, she had no luggage when she arrived?) to be more precise, a new outfit for every scene. One starts to wonder why such a girl who can also play the piano, and appears to be so well stocked in her wardrobe, needs to be a governess in the first place? Apparently the director doesn't do so. We are now rushed through the main story line. This young governess is the kind of lady who manages the young girl extremely well (the daughter never was a problem anyway), and comes into the bedroom of the gentleman late at night (??) to tell him that late nights are bad for health. She also delivers "nyakka" dialogues like "If you don't eat dinner, then neither will I," to Alzal for no apparent reason. There are also delightfully meaningful scenes where she

plays "Kanamachi" with her charge and searches for the young girl (who reaches her chest in height at the most) with her arms outstretched at her own height and ends up enfolding the father instead, who absolutely refuses to move away — but then who could blame him? As his heart starts to flutter, the father falls ill, and now the governess takes matters into her own hands and takes full charge — the age old, way proving her love and faithfulness with the respected "Nursing" strategy, and cures him. (how well, that was only too well known).

Now, society wakes up, tongues wag (we only saw the servants, for apparently no one else knew about it, other human beings were non-existent during the entire period) and the elder sister of the father (Laila Hasan) comes running to rescue her beloved brother. She absolutely vetoes a marriage with a Governess (who was asking for it anyway?).

Now the director realises he is out of time, so in comes the surprise element. Mou flutters her heavily mascaraed eyelashes and runs away quietly (the sacrifice element) and falls right in front of a moving car. This she regains her memory.

Apparently she had lost her memory in an accident and unable to remember anybody — including her husband — had run away from the hospital (I suppose with 2 suitcases loaded with clothes, makeup and accessories). The latter part the viewers had already been tortured with. So the drama, ended to the relief of the viewers, who never had been with the story anyway. Every BTV drama has a lesson in it, this one possibly declared "Mou is a model" as a leading slogan in every scene of it.

Well it's better than dramas where innocent and adorable village belles run with "bothis" to defend many causes, or heroines boldly tell their suitors not to disturb them in university corridors but to meet them in the sanctity of their own houses (which is then shown to be their bedrooms!).

God knows where the BTV dramatists and directors get their common sense of ethics and logic from. But the point is, if this is the kind of entertainment that they feed the public with so many times a week, the younger members of it will soon freak out.



The Unfinished Ladder

Carl Sagan : He Who Remains Forever Young

by Rumana Tasmin Khan

"May you build a ladder to the stars
and climb,
May your song always be sung,
May you stay forever young."
— An unknown song-writer

methods of recollection. Any person, even a novice to the studies of the brain's capabilities and functions, would easily learn all that, by reading the book.

The book Cosmos, based on the 1980's award winning TV series with the same title, turned out to be an international best-seller. The TV series itself was based on some of the ideas of The Dragons of Eden and Broca's Brain. For example — the Cosmic Calendar. Dr Sagan summed up all the history of the universe and mankind in one year. He started with the Big Bang on January 1st and continued with the first human's arrival on 31st December.

What the book did contain were the system in which the cosmos operates, life cycles of stars, voyages through space, possibility of time travel and a journal of the history of scientific discoveries.

One of the brilliant ideas expressed in this book was in the chapter "Encyclopedia Galactica" — the number of possible civilizations in the Milky Way Galaxy that are capable of radio astronomy. With the help of Frank Drake of Cornell University, Dr Sagan formulated an equation with seven quantities multiplied to form one number.

The quantities stood for factors like the number of stars in the Milky Way Galaxy, fraction of stars with planetary systems, number of habitable planets in a given system, fraction of planets on which life generates, fraction of inhabited planets, with intelligent life forms, fraction of civilizations capable of radio astronomy and fraction of planetary lifetime graced by a technical civilization.

Another such brilliant idea was presented in the same chapter. Only this one was hypothetical computer summaries of civilizations, done by Jon Lomberg and Dr Sagan himself.

While imagining an encyclopedia consisting of facts about all civilizations that will be discovered in the future, three of such facts charts were given in the book. The three civilizations of which two were ancient and capable of advanced technology, one was a profile about ourselves.

In 1976 the Viking 1 and 2 probes reached Mars and plunged into its atmosphere for landing. The far these were the only successful landers on Mars. The group of scientists who had been engaged in controlling the probes included Dr Sagan. This Viking Lander Imaging Flight Team had to decide the landing spot for the probes, and then had to guide the probes to conduct various investigations and experiments. The investigations included analysing soil contents and the atmosphere, detecting life forms and learning of Martian geography. The experiments, however, were regarding the effect of organic 'soup' on Martian soil.

The Pioneer 10 and 11 were the first spacecrafts to go beyond the solar system. They each carried messages that represented our civilization. The purpose of this was to 'declare' our existence to any alien being encountered in deep space. For these spacecrafts the message was on gold anodized aluminium plaques.

The 6-by-9 inch etched plaques contained figure of a man and a woman — the man holding up his right palm as a gesture of peace and friendship. The plaque also showed the nature of the space vehicle and the location of the origin of the message. The epoch, along with other information was coded in scientific language that may be understood by unearthly beings. This whole message was designed by Dr Sagan.

Similarly the recorded message sent with the Voyager 1 and 2 spacecrafts was devised by Dr Sagan. This Voyager inter-

stellar Record consisted of human greetings in 60 languages, sounds of humpback whales, music from various cultures — all in a disc titled "The Sounds of Earth". The Voyagers also carried some information about our genes and nervous system, and photographs of human beings from all over the world performing their daily lives.

It seemed that one of the principles by which Dr Sagan lived by was love for planet Earth and its nature and inhabitants. "We are set irrevocably, I believe, on a path that will take us to the stars — unless," he wrote in the concluding paragraph of Broca's Brain, "in some monstrous capitulation to stupidity and greed, we destroy ourselves first."

The last few words of Cosmos followed, "Our loyalties are to the species and the planet. We speak for Earth. Our obligation to survive is owed not just to ourselves but also to that Cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring." Such words of his should be taken as the 'Prime Directive' of each aware member of the society.

Dr Carl Sagan was the David Duncan Professor of Astronomy and Space Sciences and the Director of the Laboratory for Planetary Studies at the Cornell University. His specialization was on exobiology, and his many years' research gifted us with the understanding of the phenomenon involved in greenhouse effect in Venus, the dust storms of Mars, organic clouds of Titan, origin of life and search for extraterrestrial lives.

He had written over 600 scientific papers and is author, co-author and editor of more than twenty books. He wrote the introduction of Stephen Hawking's A Brief History of Time. For his help in designing messages to be sent with interstellar spacecrafts, Dr Sagan was awarded with the NASA Medal for Exceptional Scientific Achievement. He won many other awards, including the Joseph Priestly Award "for distinguished contributions to the welfare of mankind."

Dr Carl Sagan was born in 1934 of Samuel and Rachel Sagan. He died in December 1996 at the age of 62. He left behind his unfinished ladder to the heavens.