

Women pin their hopes on Chandrika. (1994, August 28). *Sunday Island.*

Women pin their hopes on Chandrika

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Sunday Island Features Desk

The elections ushered in an era of change, even to the extent of bringing in a Prime Minister of the fairer sex.

On August 18, 1994, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was sworn in as the fourteenth Prime Minister of Sri Lanka.

Has this event brought Sri Lankan women any closer to the elusive goal of emancipation, or is it simply a case of intrusion of women into 'all-male territory' as one woman put it? Yet again, perhaps, the gender aspect is not so important. On the question of a woman prime minister Sri Lankan women expressed a different view.

Somawathie, a 32-year roadsweeper was going about her daily task when we accosted her.

"I am very glad that Chandrika Mathini was appointed the Prime Minister. I am certain that she will work for the good of everyone of us, even the down-trodden

masses. She will also be more sensitive to the needs of women," she added.

We were interrupted by Chandrawathie, a portly middle-aged roadsweeper who voluntarily voiced her views on the subject.

"Yes, yes, I quite agree. She is a blessing in disguise," she conceded.

Emmeline, a quaintly attired 70-year-old was going about her marketing accompanied by her faithful 'ayah' when we spoke to her.

"Well, ... nothing of this sort happened in my day. It is change no doubt, but I wonder whether it is for the better. However, since we managed to live through the premierships of one woman, I don't think that this would be too difficult," she said.

Emmeline represents a fast dwindling class of Sri Lankan women hailing from a bygone era - an era where women were to be seen, but not heard.

Academic Prof. Savithri Gunasekera

had much to say:

"We are very fortunate that in Sri Lanka gender-based discrimination is not extensive. People voted for Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga simply because she is competent, but not because they saw her as a widow, a mother or a woman. We are hopeful that she will act not as a woman, but as a human being, and we can also expect a gender-sensitive approach towards issues," said Prof. Gunasekera.

The president of the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Women Indrani Iriyagolla, a doughty fighter herself said:

"I wouldn't look at it from a gender-based angle because it is more a historic happening as she is the third prime minister hailing from the same family.

"Yet it is pleasing to have three women of cabinet rank and to see more women at decision-making level looking into affairs and issues from a

womanly and therefore human touch," she added.

Dr. Wimala de Silva, a well-known personage said:

"Being a woman she will look at things differently. Yet I really don't see a difference. Man or woman

the faith and trust placed in her. If she does this she will prove that a woman can indeed play a leading role in a man's world."

Helmaelie Perera (21) a student, summed up in just one word, what the new

"I am certain that as a woman the Premier will be more sensitive to the suffering undergone by women. Her's will be a Government with the vital thing is that they do a good job."

Mrs. Daisy Gunawardene, a middle-aged teacher expressed indifference:

"The fact that she is a woman fails to reassure me. In the long run what matters would be her performance. Positive results are the surest manner of proving that she is a concerned, committed and capable person."

Mrs. Siva Obeysekera, a pioneer in the sphere of development of rural women, was ecstatic over the appointment of Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga as the Premier.

"It's wonderful. It will greatly encourage women. This proves that women are capable. As a woman she will have a fair judgement and a more humane approach, which is most essential.

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woman's point of view. I hope that not only Mrs. Kumaratunga but also the other two ladies would widen representation of women at the top level of all ministries, departments and diplomatic service.

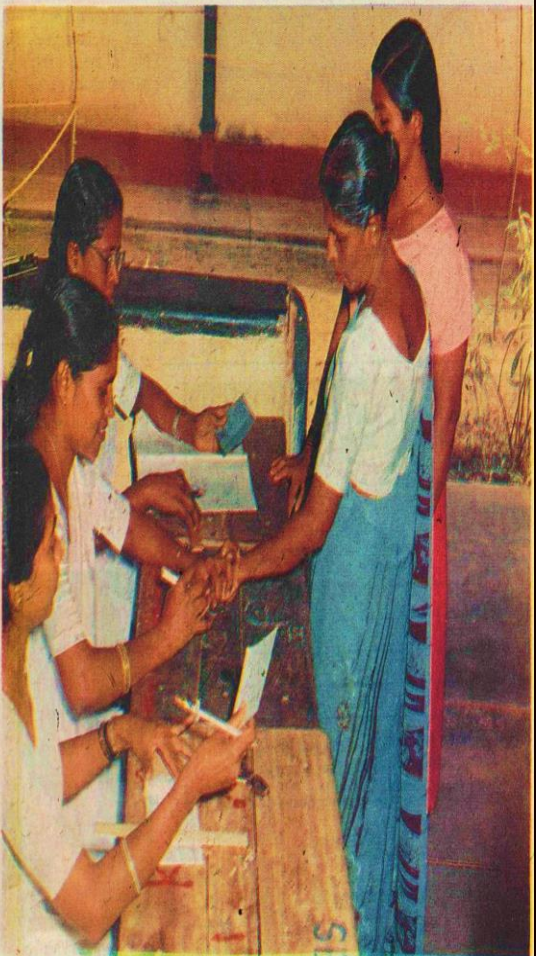
"We hope that she will address issues like rape and sex-related violence with greater force. It is also expected that she sets the role for good government and upholds

Premier symbolised.

"Hope."

"She has instilled hope in the hearts of the young. Hope for change and change for the better," she added.

"Maybe it's just a dream, ever elusive, but I intend to keep an open mind and cling onto the slim chance that there will be change for the better, she explained.



A VOTE FOR EMANCIPATION?

"The fact that she carried out this campaign as a lone de-

spite the adverse propaganda proves that she remains un-

daunted by challenges which cross her path."

Thus the Premier represents 'hope for change' for Sri Lankan women.