

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga – a profile. (1994, August 24). *The Island*.

Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga — a profile

Chandrika is a charismatic figure. Fearless, she moves around with ease and has crystallized the hopes of millions of people — a vast following looking for a leadership to articulate their thinking. She is a woman of courage. She has not succumbed to the enormous, arduous and trials with which fortune has challenged her. A weaker character would have collapsed and fled from the fray long ago. Ease, comfort and a secure and an aristocratic existence was there for the asking. What then has motivated her?

Birth has given her a sense of confidence, nature a flair to mix, education at St. Bridget's, and the Sorbonne an intellectual agility veneered with a sense of wanting to serve her people. Nationality, caste, race and economic advantages seem not to affect her dealings with people. Her fearlessness shows her sense of role in history. It is almost as if a dead father and a dead husband are guiding her to correct a nation's misguided course. She is influenced by their voices. Was it not Vijay that went to Jaffna and took Chandrika with him to India, when no other Sinhala leader dared to venture forth?

Reading Shaw's Joan of Arc recently, I pondered over the parallels. Does she project the image of a modern day Joan of Arc? Like the English and the French political and clerical establishment of Joan's time we all ask the question — can she be our worthy leader? The people do not ask this. They accept her.

The country is today riddled with corruption which we have accepted as a part of our way of life. It is a nation with no value system. Leaders make laws on one day to break them the same day to their advantage with every excuse. Leaders are unconcerned about what they say and their credibility is non-existent. We have a million refugees. Our country is divided geographically, politically and economically. The next round



of slaughtering the youth in the South is within sight, if the economy does not respond to their needs soon. In the North, this is a daily occurrence. Our leaders have been helpless. Their policies have been without any imagination; there has been no innovative thinking; the last government's thinking was threadbare.

It is in this context that Chandrika emerges as a phoenix. As we watch her we are looking for the players. There are the politicians. If you write of one or the other you feel guilty that you have left out scores of honest men with unblemished records.

There is C.V. and Anuruddha. There is Nimal Siripala and Dharmasiri. There is D. M. Jayaratna, Kingsley Wickremaratne and Mahinda. Then there are the seniors like Mrs. B. Kalugalle and K. B. who still have a tremendous role to play as counsellors and elder statesmen.

Chandrika is fortunate in that she has got the total commitment of G. L. Peiris and Lakshman Kadirgamar. They would not have joined her for fun. They are from the handful of the country's wise men with an international reputation.

Can Lakshman, for example give a direction to the Tamils to rethink their role in the context of a united Sri Lanka or will we have to live and be amused with the histrionics of some and be terrified with the brutality of others — both groups who do not have the mental capacity to contri-

bute in any way to a solution to the national problem which requires mature minds.

The Tamils have always given the highest regard to intellectual integrity and brilliance. Today, that leadership supreme and mature remains in the hands of a very few. Lakshman certainly is one of them. He is not only a Tamil. He actually belongs to the nation. In fact, he has proved that he belongs to the world community. We are very fortunate that he has agreed to come forward. Have the Tamils found a modern day Ponambalam Ramanathan, another Ponambalam Arunachalam to adorn the portals of our legislature?

There are other outstanding people from whom we expect extraordinary performance and output. The support we have to give to them to achieve this is as important as the hard work and leadership we expect from them. They have to be given the opportunities as well as the remuneration and recognition to prevent the sad state the Ministers of the last administration had to fall into and take with them the fortunes of the country. Can we be practical and work towards an incorruptible society in a realistic way?

The catalogue of what has to be done is a long one. We see a Sri Lanka reawakening under the leadership of a competent leader supported by an able team. There are a few areas the government's mind should be addressed to immediately. They include a policy of national reconciliation based on a massive economic input into the Eastern Province and South — a Marshall plan paying particular attention to the immediate needs and aspirations of the people. The political discussion has to go on but we have to commence the economic thrust immediately. The thrust has to be in the region of several billions. The same is applicable to the North once peace and the administration is restored.

Imaginative thinking on financial Policy spearheaded by

the Prime Minister herself and supported by the best financial expertise with a grasp of overall financial and international contacts and a high level think tank has to work overtime to work on two fronts. One to maintain the confidence of the private sector, the investors and fund managers who have contributed in a major way to accelerate the growth rate in the economy. Then a plan to be worked out and projected to stimulate a high growth rate into the next decade.

The new administration has brought with it a new sobriety. One looks forward to a policy of concern and commitment for the less fortunate and a genuine attempt at broadbasing equity with communitarian aspirations. We have also got to learn to live within our means and generate a very high ratio of savings for investments. Hard work has to be both expected and rewarded. That message Chandrika will give from the first day. Nothing comes from nothing but with hard work the aspirations of the Manifesto could be met.

A moment in our history has arrived, when we realize that those in office are only holding this in trust for the people and those with resources whether it be money, influence or other skills should also look upon these as held in trust for the betterment of society as a whole. The "robber barons" have no place in this new age. Waste, plunder, pillage, ostentation and dirty tricks have no place in this society. In this context, however vigilance is needed to avoid sabotage and undermining.

Chandrika will lead her colleagues to value their courage and capacity. Also to carry the flame of democracy. They will work for their ideals with faith in their countrymen, with self-discipline, magnanimity, tolerance and modesty. Their example of hard productive work will give way to wheeler dealing and short cuts which have been the order of the day.

by Cinncinatus