

International Success and Domestic Failure: The World's First Female Prime Minister and the  
Changing of Sri Lanka's Official Language

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Student Composed Words: 1200

Multimedia Time: 2:44

Process Paper Word Count: 500

I am often drawn to the histories of science and technology. When I started choosing my topic for this year, I was again on that path. However, the theme, *Debate and Diplomacy: Successes, Failures and Consequences*, pushed me out of my comfort zone. I had previously heard my family members mention Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the world's first female prime minister, though I knew little about her. After a few Google searches, I discovered that she was a prominent diplomat on the international scene, but her abuse of power caused much debate and turmoil at home. Additionally, Bandaranaike caused many successes and failures during her terms, for both herself and Sri Lanka.

I began my research with secondary sources to obtain a grasp of Sri Lankan history. I found recent articles from American newspapers like the *New York Times* and Sri Lankan ones like *Tamil Guardian*. I learned that Bandaranaike focused mainly on the Sinhalese Sri Lankan ethnic group, which reflected her identity. I discovered that Bandaranaike's policies oppressed Tamils, a Sri Lankan minority group.

Although I found many reputable sources, I also found unreliable ones, and it was challenging to determine each source's trustworthiness.

Many of my sources, including those from the Sri Lankan government, had strong biases. While this was initially a setback, I soon realized that by identifying the sources' biases, I could learn more about the creators' stands on Bandaranaike.

Secondary sources led me to primary sources like newspaper articles from Sri Lanka representing how the media portrayed both Bandaranaike and the Tamil separatists. I found videos and images, capturing both Bandaranaike's voice and the consequences of her words.

Additionally, I spoke to two Tamil Sri Lankans who wish to remain anonymous. Because they lived in Sri Lanka at the time of Bandaranaike's power, their opinions were incredibly

helpful to my research. Their desire for anonymity also demonstrates persistent Tamil fear surrounding this topic.

I decided to create a website because of its malleability in terms of multimedia. I enjoyed adding images and newspaper clippings that support and enhance my writing. I have made websites before, so I did not find developing a website with NHDWebCentral to be difficult. I decided to use maroon and yellow as the accent colors of my website because they appear on the flag of Sri Lanka, which was adopted after independence.

I argue that Bandaranaike's actions promoting the Sinhala-only policy escalated the Tamil separatist movement and sparked a civil war. Bandaranaike, although successful in her international reputation, failed as Sri Lanka's leader to represent the Tamils fairly.

Being half Tamil Sri Lankan, this is the story of my family's country. This history is important more broadly because Bandaranaike was an internationally revered politician, yet is not noted outside of Sri Lanka for the conflicts she caused. Newspapers like the *New York Times* focus on precedents she set as a woman. While this is incredibly important to discuss, it is also important to understand her impact on Sri Lanka as a Sinhalese individual.