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Under-Representation of Women in Indian Politics

The Indian Constitution in Part III provides equal political rights to all the citizens of India, including women. However, these rights are usurped and seized mainly by the male population of India. While women constitutes about 48 percent of the population (Census, 2011), their political representation in the 16th Lok Sabha consist only of 11.8 percent, which is the highest percentage in the history of independent India. According to a study conducted by Inter-Parliamentary Union, India ranks 149th in a list of 193 countries in terms of women's representation in the lower House (Lok Sabha) of Parliament as of July 1, 2017.

To increase the number of women representation in the Parliament, a bill has been introduced several times and is known as the 108th Amendment bill of the Constitution (2008). The bill aims to raise the voices of women in both Houses of Parliament (Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha) as well as in the State assemblies by one-third. This paper seeks to draw the attention on this particular bill and its purpose to improve the representation of women in the political field.

There are various reasons behind under-representation of women in India in the political field. Does the bill has provisions to ensure that the voices of Indian women representatives are heard in the decision-making process? Will this bill ensure assertion of their political right? The bill argues it will provide reservation for women representatives to take part in the political process. Does it violate the right of equal opportunities in the political realm? The paper would inquire about all these queries.

Keywords: India, Lok Sabha, Political Representation, Rajya Sabha, Reservation, Women Leaders, Under-representation.

Introduction:

The women's active participation in the political process in any country can enhance the effectiveness of its democratic institutions. B R Ambedkar once said that political power is the key to all social progress. Indian women participation in the political activities, decision-making and voting process is under-represented. A Survey Report prepared by Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian, "women in politics 2017" stated that Lok Sabha has 64 (11.8 percent of 542 MPs) and Rajya Sabha has 27 (11 percent of 245 MPs). In 2016, out of 4118 MLAs across the country, only 9 percent are women".

First general election in India were held in 1951- 1952, The women voters turnout was about 37% and it rose to 66.70% in the 16th Lok Sabha (2014). The first and 16th Lok Sabha witnessed women's representation as 4.5% and 12%, respectively. Meanwhile, the political empowerment of women has been enriched, first time, by the 73rd and again by the 74th constitutional amendments done in 1992 and 1993, respectively. These amendments have ensured women's representation at lower level of the decentralized stages of the Indian democratic system. Local women leaders have become an inspiration to the women at large to enter the political field.

The Number of women in India Parliament: Under-Representation

The Indian Parliament is composed of two Houses - Upper House (Rajya Sabha) and Lower House (Lok Sabha). Rajya Sabha, known as the Council of State, represents the States while the Lok Sabha represents the people. Rajya Sabha has 250 members and the Lok Sabha consists of 545 members.

The Indian democratic chapter begins with the first general elections held in 1951-52. According to Khan, the number of eligible voters was 17.32 crores out of the total population of 35.66 crores (approximately) as per the 1951. The number of eligible voters was 48.56 percent of the population and voter turnout was 45.7 percent. In the first Lok Sabha, out of 499 seats, 22 seats (4.4%) were won by

women members. Two women members were appointed in the Council of Ministers. **Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur** was the first Cabinet Minister and **Maragatham Chandrasekhar** was appointed as Deputy Minister, (Syamala Devi:1994).

The women voter's turnout in the elections was remarkable, both in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies elections. From 1962 to 2018, It almost increased to 27 percent. For the first time, Election Commission of India released the separate data on women voters in 1962. The figure in 1962 was 46.7% and 65.5% in 2014. if we compare with the men voters, in 1962, It was 62.1% and in 2014 it increased by 4.9% to reach 67.0% (Sopariwala, 2019).

Rai (2017) discusses the number of women voters in general elections in India, She says that in 1990s, the women's participation has increased. She and Deshpande (2004) argue that women in developing countries are less politically active than the men. How did the voting behaviour of women take place in elections in India 2004 and 2009?

Reasons of Under-Representation of Women in Indian Parliament and State Assemblies

The main reasons of under-representation of women leaders in political decision making process in India is associated with patriarchy culture, criminalization of politics, and soft stigmas, lack of political education and political awareness. However, decision making ministries were not taken seriously by male dominated ministries in India. However, Mrs Indira Gandhi was an exceptional case to study the status of women leaders and their empowerment in India.

Many scholars such as (Sekhon, 2006), (Tootell, 2015), (Rai, 2017) mainly associates the under-representation of women in politics to the Indian patriarchal society. Sekhon (2006) says that social, cultural, economic and political factors also contribute to it. Caste and class inequalities, illiteracy, lack of political knowledge and stipulated laws make the path of women's entry into politics more vulnerable. Some study shows that under-representation of women in India is associated with four Ps, Patriarchy, Poverty, Promotion advancement insufficiency, and Powerlessness. Women under-representation is also associated with the economic inequality, lack of economic access and uneven financial and land rights.

Women Reservation Bill in the parliament:

The bill was first introduced by the H D Devegoda government on 12th September, 1996 in Lok Sabha. It was re-introduced by the Vajpayee government, but collapsed due to Lok Sabha dissolution .

First question that comes to mind against the bill is why do women need this bill? The answer to this question is simply given by the Wahgchuk (2018), He argues for the significance and importance of the bill. The symbolic and political parties agenda to put women candidates as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha or the first women President of India does not represent women's ambitions to have the real decision making power. Being the first woman President of India, Mrs Partibha Devisingh Patil (2007-2012), did not make a positive transformation of the women's representation, even though, the women reservation bill was passed during her tenure by the Upper House of Parliament. (A bill becomes an Act only after it has been passed by both the Houses of Parliament.

The available reading material relating to the women reservation bill indicates that it seeks to enhance women's participation in The political field and is not limited to voting rights only. The bill attempts to include women's participation in the decision making process. As women's role in the field of political decision making has not been discussed widely, the real purpose of the bill is to secure women's rights in this field. Women's active participation in the political activities could change their lives. The literature does not discuss the bill's consequences and does not compare the positive impact made with the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments. The paper argues that the bill (2008) will increase women's representation in Indian parliament and state assemblies. But the women leaders have to lead the way and effect the required changes in the society by themselves, which could initiate their participation in the decision making process.

Methods:

The research question mainly deal with women reservation bill and its consequences. As mentioned earlier, the bill is yet to be passed in the Lok Sabha. Lower house, so the time period divided in the introduction of the bill first time in the both the house in 1990s and it debates after that. The Second one is the consequences after the introduction and passed by the Rajya Sabha in 2010.

The present study uses data of the Election Commission of India after each general election to get the official picture of the women voters and women's representation in both the Houses of Parliament. Concern about the 108th Amendment bill and the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have been analyzed to understand the significance of women's entrance in the political sphere.

Despite the fact the bill is yet to be passed by the Lok Sabha - House of the peoples' representative, the paper is closely monitoring the reasons relating to that. Descriptive and analytical methods have been used. The study is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary source such as government documents, speeches and statements of Indian political leaders, Official records, and documents relating to the Women Reservation Bill, policy documents from the websites of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha etc. Secondary source of information includes books, journal articles, newspapers and joint conferences, multimedia, etc.

Theoretical perspective

John Rawls 'A theory of Justice' gives justice to the most vulnerable section of the society. It could be understood as the positive discrimination and soft power. Rawls theory of justice argues about distributive justice. It suggests and guarantees the right for each person's liberty. It is evident that his theory propagates the principle of social and economic justice for all. It advocates welfare based principles in society.

According to Rawls, there are some principles of justice which enhance equality. This equality could be achieved through agreements. These agreements are the law which are enforced by the authority of the State, so that justice and fairness could be achieved. His principle of justice establishes an ideal society. The 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill (2008) has been argued about Rawls theory of distributive justice and affirmative actions.

Data :

During the Indian freedom struggle in 1917 raised the issue of universal adult franchise. The British rule in India gave women the voting rights on the basis of education, property and more importantly wifehood. The mini constitution of India - Government of India Act (1935) gave women the voting right at the age of 21 years and who had fulfilled the education and property conditions. The Indian constitution (1950) granted universal adult franchise to all Indian citizens, including women.

In 1974, report of the committee on the status of women addressed the issue of low number of participation of women in political bodies and in the 'national perspective plan for women (1988)', recommended a reservation (quota) of 30 % in Panchayats - lowest and decentralization institutions in India. Later, the national policy for empowering of women (2001) introduced reservation bill, at the higher level, in the Parliament in 1996, 1998 and 1999. However, the bill could not be passed due to dissolution of the Lok Sabha.

The 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill (2008), known as the 'Women Reservation Bill', was introduced in the Rajya Sabha on May 6, 2008 by Man Mohan Singh government, which was passed by the House in 2010. It provides 1/3rd seats to women in political bodies.. The major highlight of the bill has been reservation for SC/ST women. This will exist for 15 years after the commencement of the Act. The bill seeks to examine the role and improve the political condition of women. The same studies show that deprived sections of society got a reservation, for example SC/ST and has increased redistribution of political resources in unfavored and vulnerable groups.

Table 1. (Appendix 1), represents 'turnout of the women voters in general elections in India'. The Election Commission of India (ECI) in the first (1951-52) and the second (1952) general election did not release the separate data on male and female turnout. In the third election, ECI made an initiative on the male and female data on turnout.

There is a huge difference between male and female representation in the Lok Sabha, The Indian constitution provides equal legal rights to men and women. However, the main reasons for an imbalanced and an inequality of participation of women in the Indian parliament are poverty, illiteracy, sexual violence, discrimination, lack of the winnability factor, lack of political will of political parties, fear of loss of muscle power against men, etc. Women face internal and external violence. The main reasons that hinder the women to be part of the legislative are social and cultural barriers, which are the base for earning bread and butter for men especially in the Indian scenario. Women are restricting themselves to 'motherhood duties'.

Women are considered the most vulnerable class in the Indian society. They are oppressed and exploited every moment of life. Women are the victims of an age-old patriarchal society. The political parties consider women as having the lowest winning ability due to the women voter's attitude towards the women candidates. Women candidates are decided by the social patterns, and social norms, political

background where women candidates are considered unfit in the scenario. Political party's lack of political will, and later the male counterpart's indifference in the parliament, absence of commitment to gender issues are some of the core hurdles which bring the women on the last stage of the political staircase.

Bar graph 1, represents the female MPs in Lok Sabha election from 1951 to 2014. The 16th Lok Sabha has the largest number of women MPs, constituting about 12.15%. The Sixth Lok Sabha (1977-1980) had the least representation of women MPs, despite the woman occupying the post of prime minister. Their percentage constituted only about 3.8 percent in the Lok Sabha.

Political position can bring change at all stages, the best motivation example is the 73rd (1992) and 74th (1993) constitutional amendment provided 33 % quota to women leaders at the lowest level of the Indian decentralized democratic system at the Panchayat level and municipality levels. In a few states with 50% reserved seats in panchayats and municipalities include "Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tripura, while other states (including Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Manipur, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal) have 50% reserved seats for women only for panchayats" General Quata Database (2018). India is very far to provide equal political, social and economic opportunity to both the gender. While the preamble guarantees "equality of status and to promote among them all".

There are 19 Indian states implemented of women's representations in PRIs in India, Bihar were the first state to implement 50% reservation for PRIs. When Bihar government implemented, 50% in 2006, the result was pleasantly surprising as women voting turned around 54.85 % compared to 50.7 of male voting and record 34 women MLAs out of the 243 Legislative Assembly made their way to political participation. *Mukhiya pati* or *Sarpach Pati* was on the during the first generation of election in Panchayati Raj.

The history of debate of equal political right for both the gender have been ages old, and women reservation bill introduction (1996) to Passed (2010) in one house has come so far. The most critical and central question of the bill is why it is still on the waiting list? While, most of the political parties support it for their political gain. This 108 constitutional bill would have significant development of women's representation and raise awareness at political battlefields.

Bar Graph 2, in 1996, the number of women contestants was the highest (599). But the emergency period massively hurt the women image as the leader. Mrs Indira Gandhi emergency provision did not allow women leaders to come up in the 1997 election. In this election, it was the least number after the independence, democratic history of India. Post 1995, period was the coalition government era, which gave regional parties the bargaining power with the national parties. The regional parties bet on the tickets for male contestants in various Lok Sabha elections in 1998, 1999 and 2004. But the numbers have been raised in the 2009 and 2014 consistently.

Conclusion:

Nagaland - A northeast state of India failed to have a women MLA in the state assembly, their history of 55 years state election and only one woman politician Rana M Shaiza reached the Lok Sabha in the post emergency election (1977) in India. This example demonstrated the under-representation of women in Indian political bodies.

India is an emerging power in all international platforms, while its image on the status of women concludes the worst place to live and for all the reasons. Status of women is largely associated with cultural and social aspect factors, which is deep rooted in the culture of India. However, India has to long way to achieve women equal political opportunity and decision making process.

To establish an economic structure such as the women and child development department at the Union and state level and formation of the National Commission for women in states and Union Territories has made some headlines in the progress of women political affairs.

This bill hurts the sentiments of the male dominant political structure of India. The conservative view of the political parties, the ideology of the political parties and actions have massive gaps. During election time, the big promised have been proposed for women, but in the name of tickets and they have been used as the voter card and vote bank politics. Political parties bet on the women leaders. Political parties think that women leaders lack win ability factor in the general election. The misuse of power of male leaders is also keeping women leaders away from political life. The bill will add women's representation and decision making on a daily affairs of women related such as the pay gap, domestic violence, safety and security.

Women's participation in household decision making according to National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-16), revealed that women take decisions on own health issues and household purchase and to visit family. The big decisions are out of the reach of women in

households. Are these matters really considered as the decision making process? Then, how patriarchy dominant politics in India give rights to women when the decisions have to make for the security and external affairs in political comes.

The panchayati raj system was first adopted in Rajasthan. A survey has been conducted and revealed that women in villages with a head position reserved are more likely to be willing to report crimes to the police station. Result from Rajasthan and West Bengal are positive outcome to improve basic needs like water, sanitation and primary education, to build roads, mainly infrastructure and public health.

The focus of the women sarpanchs is the disadvantaged groups of the society. In the data of 2002, revealed that more road and water facilities has been increased and initiatives led by women representatives in Rajasthan and West Bengal. Political reservation and political awareness have been raised among women in India. "In fact, another United Nations study illustrates that women-led panchayats have delivered 62% higher drinking water projects than those led by men". (Wahgchuk, 2018)

Despite the injustice in political participation at central level, the local level in Rajasthan and controlled by the patriarchy and social taboo removed / destroyed the odds and make space for young women leaders. Women sarpanachs at the local bodies have very much encouraging the numbers of after 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments, Article 243D and 243T have been added in the Indian constitution to make way for one-third SC/ST women in the local bodies. Before these two amendments the representations of women in local bodies were only four percent, post reservation it increased to 40%.

The idea to have a reservation within the political party's institutional bodies rather than parliament. Internal women's representation is quite low in political parties. Women in India have a lack of education and leadership training. They only received training due to the political atmosphere in their home. The real powers exercised by their male counterparts. To fill the political gap through reservation has remained a dream for many women to enter into the politics. The political empowerment of women is essential, women must come in the political by their will power rather than become the agents of their male family members. Rani (2019), says that the bill unlikely empower and has immediate impact on women. She argues that women voted for change and men voted for the status quo in the constituencies.

Political parties must take women's participation and encourage the numbers in the inter constitutional bodies. To achieve this target, the regional political parties have given representative in 2019 in the 17th general election, Naveen Patnaik -*Biju Janta Dal*, Mamta Banerjee's -*All India Trinamool Congress*, political parties and many more. Despite all the facts of the current general election (2019) in India, the winning percentage of the women could be whatsoever. But this election will be remembered to give not so equal, but some breathing space of women's representation in an election without the so called 'reservation'.

Political parties, Indian and state governments must use the media and educational institution to reach the target and spread awareness on the women political participation. Opportunity for women have in political field must be advertised on the commercials. Women leaders at the Panchayati Raj need to develop a model political policy that brings change in the deep rooted patriarchy political system.

The political sphere and government make sure about the safe heavens for the women at work place and in the political field. A zero tolerance policy towards gender discrimination and harassment, Must be adopted internally by the political parties.

Government transparency and high level of democracy, less corruption could lead to a way for the women entering into the political realm. Greater equality between male and female in the political front, it is a political process, which able equal power to women. Political equality includes not only equal rights in voting, but it's crucial to gain the access to the institutional centers of powers.

The success stories of Panchayati raj system in India and women's political participation. The central argument about the bill enhance the women's political participation and the bill enhance the women power in decision making and become co-decider and co-authoritative. But the opposition of the bill assumed that the women reserved seats go against the merit based nomination.

Raising the numbers of parliamentarian do not mean to empower women and have more authority and influence policy decision as most of the decisions are taken by the cabinet ministers which women are mostly not the part of it. In a democratic system, gender blind game always hurt the democratic values. Therefore, it is a blunder and violation of democratic institution and democratic values. The reservation system has been introduced in many states in the world in the political sphere. It becomes a new mechanism to introduce and substantial increase the women political participation to make a reality.

Reservation (quota) system has been introduced to increase gender based equality in legislative bodies and to address under-representation of women. Reservation brings competitive equality rather than equal opportunity. Giving voting rights are insufficient for women in the political sphere. They are making a massive transformation being a voter. They can make a huge positive change in the whole political bodies.

APPENDIX 1,

Table 4. Turnout of Women Voters in General Elections in India

General Elections	Total Turnout	Men's Turnout	Women's Turnout	Difference in Turnout
First (1952)	61.2	—	—	—
Second (1957)	62.2	—	—	—
Third (1962)	55.4	63.3	46.6	16.7
Fourth (1967)	61.3	66.7	55.5	11.2
Fifth (1971)	55.3	60.9	49.1	11.8
Sixth (1977)	60.5	66.0	54.9	11.1
Seventh (1980)	56.9	62.2	51.2	11.0
Eighth (1984)	64.0	68.4	59.2	9.2
Ninth (1989)	62.0	66.1	57.3	8.8
Tenth (1991)	57.0	61.6	51.4	10.2
Eleventh (1996)	58.0	62.1	53.4	8.7
Twelfth (1998)	62.0	66.0	58.0	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	60.0	64.0	55.7	8.3
Fourteenth (2004)	58.8	61.7	53.3	8.4
Fifteenth (2009)	58.2	60.2	55.8	4.4
Sixteenth (2014)	66.4	67.1	65.6	1.5

Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

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Source: Table 1. Praveen Rai, (2017), Centre for the Study of Development Societies, Delhi, India

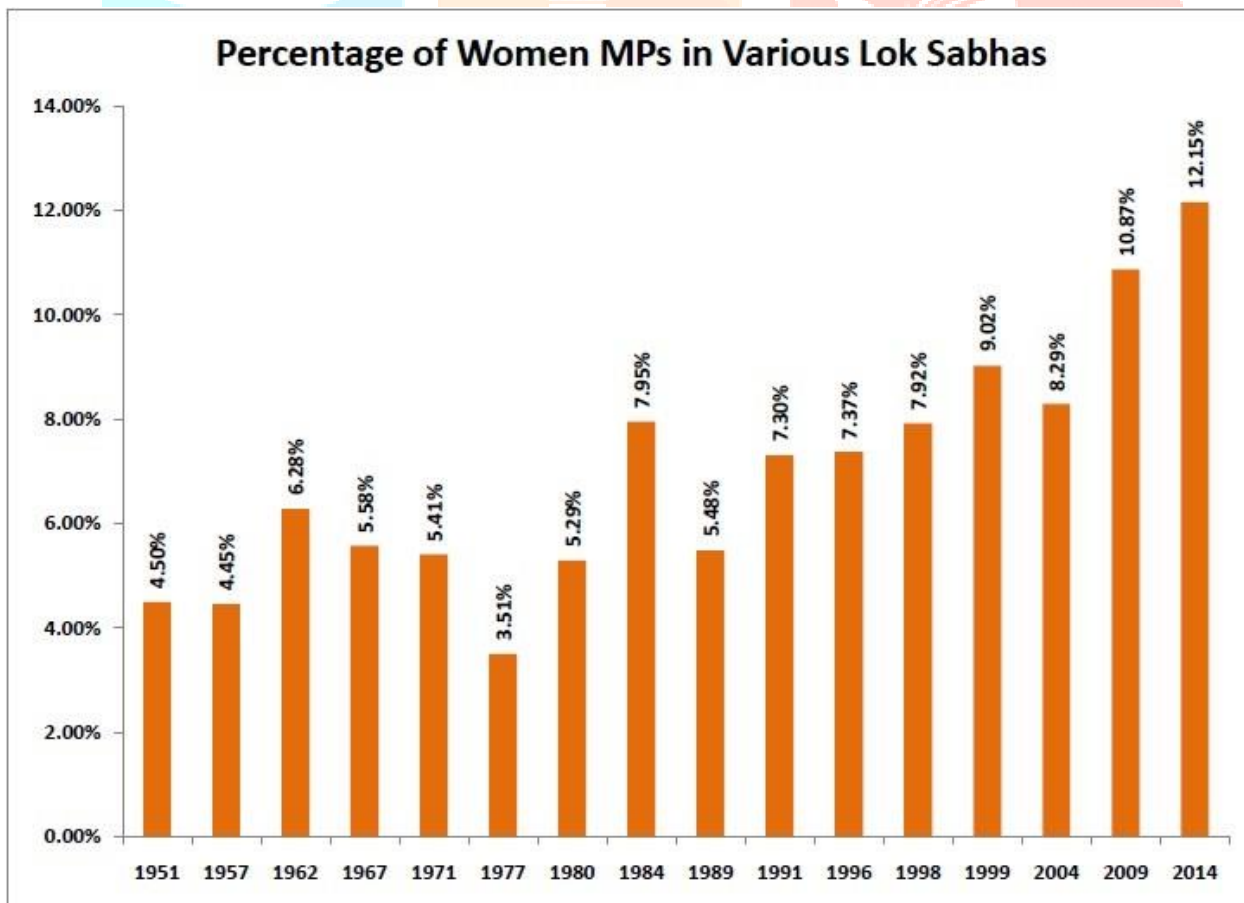
APPENDIX 2 Table 2

Table 1. Representation of Women in Lok Sabha 1952–2014

Lok Sabha	Total No. of Seats	Women Members Who Won	% of Total
First (1952)	489	22	4.4
Second (1957)	494	27	5.4
Third (1962)	494	34	6.7
Fourth (1967)	523	31	5.9
Fifth (1971)	521	22	4.2
Sixth (1977)	544	19	3.4
Seventh (1980)	544	28	5.1
Eighth (1984)	544	44	8.1
Ninth (1989)	529	28	5.3
Tenth (1991)	509	36	7.0
Eleventh (1996)	541	40*	7.4
Twelfth (1998)	545	44*	8.0
Thirteenth (1999)	543	48*	8.8
Fourteenth (2004)	543	45*	8.1
Fifteenth (2009)	543	59	10.9
Sixteenth (2014)	543	61	11.2

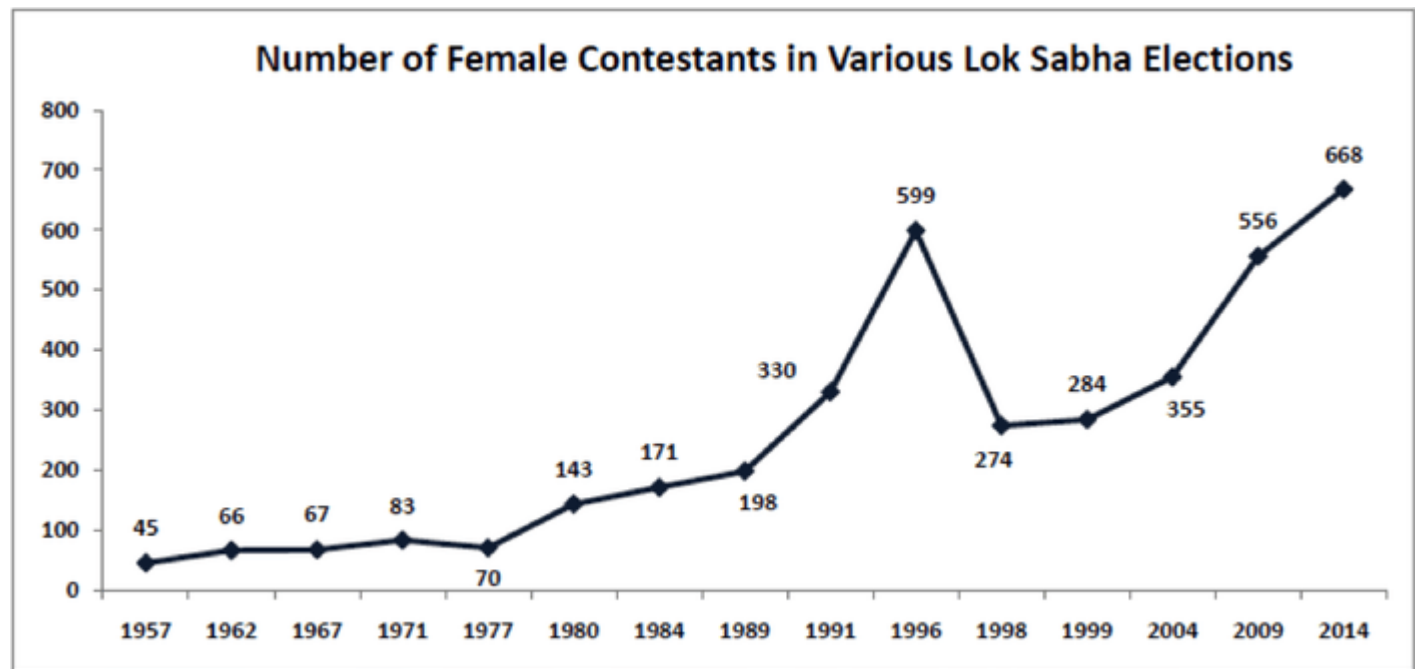
Source: Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

Note: *Including one nominated member.



Appendix 2, Bar Graph 1. Source: <https://factly.in/women-mps-in-lok-sabha-how-have-the-numbers-changed/>

Rao Bhanupriya, (2019), Women MPs in Lok Sabha: How have the numbers changed?,



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