There is no doubt that women are amongst sectors of society very significantly under represented in Parliament. There is no doubt that gender and other balances must be improved amongst MPs. Undeniably, everything reasonably possible must be done to retain and recruit women MPs. Support programmes to assist with applications are an obvious and important example. Targets should be set.

It is however, necessary to have the context well in mind. First, MPs are elected. They are not appointed. They are ultimately chosen by the electorate and by the electorate as a whole. Second, under the present system, they are elected locally, on a geographical constituency by geographical constituency basis. They are not elected nationally. Each and every constituency is autonomous. Third, the practiced reality is that on key element towards selection by a political party is selection as candidate for election. Each and every political party is and must be autonomous. It is of fundamental constitutional importance that political parties are independent of the State.

Compulsory quotas are objectionable in principle. This is for at least three reasons. First, compulsion be definition would deprive electors of choice. Electors would be instructed that the central State knows what is best. This would be undemocratic. Second, the central State would dictate to political parties what they must do and what they cannot do. This would be a dangerous precedent. Third attempted improvement by compulsion would be retrograde. Those elected from a restricted field would not be seen to have the legitimacy of those elected from an open field. It is also to be noted that such a move would not enhance the position of disadvantaged minorities generally and indeed might in particular cases be at their expense.
Action: Yes. Compulsion: No. Compulsions would create more problems than it would solve. But action there must be: especially by political parties.

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