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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Delink Women's Reservation from Delimitation: Gender Justice Cannot Wait

THE HINDU

16 April 2026

POLITY

SOCIAL ISSUES

GS2

CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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Delink Women's Reservation from Delimitation: Gender Justice Cannot Wait

The Hindu 16 April 2026 **GS2**

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The Women's Reservation Act 2023 (33% seats for women in Lok Sabha and state assemblies) cannot be implemented until delimitation is complete — a process that could take years given its political complexity. Should gender justice be held hostage to a contentious constitutional process, or should Parliament enact a standalone implementation mechanism?"

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Hindu](#)

EDITORIAL SUMMARY

The Hindu argues that linking Women's Reservation (33% seats) to delimitation completion — a process without a fixed timeline — amounts to indefinite deferral. India ranks 143rd globally in women's parliamentary representation. A rotation-based mechanism within existing constituencies could operationalise the Act immediately without waiting for delimitation.

THE TIMELINE PROBLEM

MILESTONE	STATUS (APRIL 2026)
Women's Reservation Act passed	September 2023 ✓
2021 Census published	Not yet ✗
Delimitation Commission formed	In process
Delimitation completed (estimate)	2027–2028?
State legislature ratification	2028–2029?
First election with reserved seats	2029?

The Act passed in 2023 may not produce a single reserved seat until 2029 — a 6-year gap.

INDIA'S WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION — GLOBAL CONTEXT

COUNTRY	WOMEN'S LOWER HOUSE %	MECHANISM
Rwanda	61%	Quota + PR system
Sweden	46%	Party voluntary quota
UK	35%	Party all-women shortlists
India	~15%	No mandatory quota yet operational
Pakistan	20%	Reserved seats (separate list)
Bangladesh	20%	Reserved seats

HISTORICAL ATTEMPTS

The Women's Reservation Bill was first introduced in 1996 (HD Deve Gowda government). It lapsed. Reintroduced in 1998, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010 (Rajya Sabha passed it in 2010; Lok Sabha never voted). Finally enacted as the 106th Amendment Act in September 2023.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity	Women's Reservation Act; Constitutional amendment; Delimitation
GS2 — Social Justice	Gender representation; political empowerment
GS4 — Ethics	Constitutional morality; gender equity; deferred justice
Essay	"Inclusion is not enough — institutions must be redesigned for substantive participation"
Mains Keywords	Women's Reservation Act 2023, Constitution 106th Amendment, delimitation linkage, IPU rankings, gender parity in Parliament, rotation mechanism, party-level quotas

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Linking women’s reservation to delimitation — a constitutionally complex, politically contentious, and timeline-uncertain process — amounts to indefinite deferral of gender justice and betrays the legislative intent of the Women’s Reservation Act 2023, which was passed after 27 years of parliamentary struggle.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- The Women’s Reservation Act (Constitution 106th Amendment, 2023) requires a new Census to be published AND delimitation to be completed before seats can be identified for reservation — neither of which has a fixed timeline. This open-ended conditionality has no democratic precedent in Indian constitutional history.
- India ranks 143rd globally in women’s parliamentary representation (IPU 2025); with women constituting ~15% of current Lok Sabha and ~14% of Rajya Sabha, the democratic deficit is acute. Every year of delay deepens this deficit.
- A rotation-based reservation mechanism — where constituencies are randomly selected for women’s reservation in each election from the existing 543 seats — could implement 33% reservation immediately without waiting for delimitation. Several state assemblies use similar reservation rotation for SC/ST seats.
- Party-level mandatory candidate quotas (as used in UK’s Labour Party, France, Sweden) are a complementary mechanism — requiring parties to field 33%+ women candidates even before constituency-level reservation — and do not require constitutional amendment.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Delimitation linkage was arguably necessary to prevent existing constituency boundaries — drawn on different demographic bases — from distorting the reservation’s geographic distribution. Random rotation within old boundaries may concentrate reserved seats in certain regions arbitrarily.

The linkage ensures more equitable spatial distribution of reserved seats.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Two-track approach: (1) Amend the Women’s Reservation Act to add a standalone implementation provision — using random rotation within current constituencies for immediate operationalisation; (2) Continue delimitation as a separate, parallel process and

integrate any adjusted boundaries into the reservation matrix when complete. Parliamentary standing committee review in 90 days on implementation modalities; interim target of 25% women candidates for all parties by 2027 election cycle.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

The Women's Reservation Act 2023 links operationalisation of 33% women's reservation in Parliament to the completion of delimitation. Critically examine this linkage and suggest an alternative implementation framework that ensures immediate effect. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

The Women's Reservation Act 2023 (Constitution 106th Amendment Act) reserves 33% of seats in Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies for women — a landmark after 27 years of parliamentary struggle since the bill was first introduced in 1996. However, the Act's operationalisation is linked to two conditions: publication of a new Census and completion of delimitation — neither of which has a fixed timeline.

This editorial examines why de-linking is constitutionally possible and democratically necessary.

BODY

The conditionality problem: The Act explicitly states that reserved seats will be identified after the Census is published and delimitation is completed. Given that the 2021 Census is still unpublished (delayed by COVID-19), and the proposed delimitation exercise based on 2011 Census will itself face state-level ratification challenges, the timeline for operationalisation is entirely open-ended — potentially 5–7 years away. **The gender representation deficit:** India ranks **143rd globally** in women's parliamentary representation (IPU 2025).

Women constitute ~15% of Lok Sabha and ~14% of Rajya Sabha — both far below the 33% floor of the Act. At this pace, without reservation, India would need several decades to achieve 33% through organic representation. **Alternative mechanisms are available:** A **rotation mechanism** — randomly selecting approximately 181 of 543 current constituencies as women-reserved for each election cycle — can be implemented without any new delimitation.

This approach mirrors how SC/ST reserved constituency seats are already managed through rotation in state assemblies. **Party-level quotas** — mandatory 33% women candidates — are another immediate

lever that requires no constitutional amendment, only legislative or EC action. **The counter-argument considered:** The linkage to delimitation was meant to ensure geographic equity in reserved seat distribution. But a transparent random rotation, with geographic spread constraints, addresses this concern while enabling immediate implementation.

CONCLUSION

Women's reservation has been constitutionally endorsed; what is lacking is the political will to implement it without further delay. A standalone amendment enabling rotation-based reservation within existing constituencies — effective from the next general election — is constitutionally clean, politically fair, and democratically overdue.

Gender justice cannot be held indefinitely hostage to a delimitation timeline that political actors control.

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Bharat Choudhary

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujyari →](#)<https://ujyari.com/editorials/2026/04/womens-reservation-delimitation-delink/>

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