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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

# What Corporate Board Reservation Tells Us About Women's Political Reservation

INDIAN EXPRESS

24 April 2026

SOCIAL ISSUES

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# What Corporate Board Reservation Tells Us About Women's Political Reservation

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The Indian Express

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## INTERVIEW ANGLE



*"India has passed the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (33% reservation for women in Parliament) but it awaits delimitation. What does the corporate board reservation experience teach us about how reservation policies work — and what to expect from political reservation?"*

## THE CORE ARGUMENT

The editorial uses India's **corporate board gender diversity experience** as a lens to evaluate what **political reservation for women** can and cannot achieve. India's Companies Act 2013 mandated at least one woman director on listed and certain public companies — and compliance was achieved, but critics noted "tokenism" (family members on boards, not independent professionals). Similarly, 33% reservation in Parliament (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2023) will ensure numbers but may not immediately translate to voice or policy influence if structural barriers persist. The piece argues reservation is necessary but insufficient — it must be accompanied by mentorship, institutional support, and removal of campaign finance barriers.

## CORPORATE BOARD RESERVATION — WHAT HAPPENED

### Companies Act 2013 — Section 149(1)

**Requirement:** At least one woman director on the boards of:

- Listed companies
- Public companies with paid-up capital  $\geq$  ₹100 crore OR turnover  $\geq$  ₹300 crore

**Results:**

- **Compliance achieved:** % of women on NSE-listed company boards rose from ~5% (2013) to ~18% (2024)

- **Quality concerns:** Many appointments were family members (wives/daughters of promoters) rather than independent professionals
- **Policy impact:** No systematic evidence that board gender diversity improved ESG outcomes in India (unlike Scandinavian studies showing positive effects)

## Lessons

LESSON	IMPLICATION FOR POLITICAL RESERVATION
Numbers improve with mandate	33% in Parliament will be achieved post-delimitation
“Token” appointments risk	Party leadership may field less influential women candidates
Institutional culture matters	Parliament’s work culture must also adapt
Pipeline needs building	Women need political grooming from local bodies upward

## NARI SHAKTI VANDAN ADHINIYAM 2023 (WOMEN’S RESERVATION BILL)

### Key Provisions

PROVISION	DETAIL
Reservation	33% of seats in Lok Sabha, State Assemblies
SC/ST reservation	33% of reserved SC/ST seats also reserved for women
Duration	15 years initially (renewable)
Rotational	Reserved seats will rotate after each delimitation
Effective from	After next delimitation (post-census) – not yet implemented
When operative?	Awaits delimitation exercise (post-2026 census)

### Why It Hasn’t Taken Effect Yet

The Act requires a fresh delimitation to mark reserved constituencies – which requires a census. India’s **2021 Census was delayed** (COVID, then administrative decisions). Once the census is conducted and seats are delimited, the reservation becomes operative.

## WOMEN IN INDIAN POLITICS — CURRENT STATUS

LEVEL	WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION
Lok Sabha (18th, 2024)	74 women out of 543 = 13.6%
Rajya Sabha	~15%
State Assemblies	~10% (national average)
Local bodies (post-73rd/74th Amendment)	33–50% (mandated by states)
Global average (national parliaments)	~26.9% (IPU data)

**India's rank:** ~160+ globally in women's parliamentary representation — among lower-middle percentiles.

## EVIDENCE FROM LOCAL BODIES RESERVATION

India's **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments** mandated 33% reservation for women in Panchayats and urban local bodies (many states have increased to 50%):

- **Positive outcomes:** Studies show women sarpanches prioritise water, sanitation, education
- **Proxy candidates:** In some areas, husbands or male relatives exercise actual power ("Sarpanch Pati" problem)
- **Long-term impact:** Second and third generation women elected tend to be more independent

## UPSC ANGLE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS1 — Society	Women's political participation; role of women
GS2 — Polity	Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam; 73rd/74th amendments; political representation
GS2 — Governance	Accountability; governance representation

**Mains Keywords:** Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2023, 33% reservation, delimitation, corporate board diversity, Companies Act 2013, 73rd Amendment, Panchayat reservation, Sarpanch Pati problem, women's political participation

**Probable Question:** “India has legislated 33% reservation for women in Parliament but structural barriers persist. Critically examine.” (GS1/GS2 Mains)

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