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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Do Not Hold the Women's Quota Hostage to Delimitation

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POLITY

GS2

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THE LIFT LINE

A right written into the Constitution but scheduled for a date no one can name is a promise with the delivery clause left blank.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The women's reservation is one of the most significant constitutional changes of the decade, and the debate has now shifted from whether to reserve seats to when the reservation will actually take effect. That "when" is tied to a chain of **contingent** events, a census and a delimitation, that could stretch far into the future. This gives you a clean case study in the gap between enacting a right and realising it, a distinction GS2 examiners probe repeatedly. It also lets you compare a stalled national reform with a functioning local one.

GS Paper 2: the theme covers constitutional amendments, the representation of women, the working of the Election Commission and **delimitation**, and the relationship between legislative intent and implementation. For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the **Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023**, known as the **Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam**, reserves **one-third of seats** in the **Lok Sabha** and the **State Legislative Assemblies** for women; its implementation is deferred until after a **delimitation** exercise, which itself follows the **first census** taken after the Amendment's commencement; the **84th Amendment** froze delimitation of Lok Sabha seats until the first census after **2026**; women already hold a **one-third reservation in Panchayati Raj institutions** under the **73rd Amendment** and in urban local bodies under the **74th Amendment**. For **Mains**, the argument to carry is that the census-and-delimitation trigger risks indefinitely postponing a right already granted, and that gender justice supports **decoupling** the quota from delimitation.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The demand for reserving legislative seats for women is older than most current MPs. Bills lapsed repeatedly across three decades. In 2023 Parliament finally passed the 106th Amendment with near-unanimity, a landmark by any measure. But the Amendment did not switch the reservation on. It built in a two-step

condition: the reservation takes effect only after a delimitation is carried out, and that delimitation can happen only on the basis of the first census conducted after the Amendment came into force.

Each of those steps carries its own uncertainty. The census due earlier in the decade was delayed. Delimitation is itself a **fraught** exercise, freighted with the north-south question of how population change should redraw the map, which the 84th Amendment deliberately froze until the first census after 2026. Stacking the women's quota on top of that sequence means its start date depends on two events whose timing no one can guarantee. A right that exists in the statute book but waits on a distant, contingent trigger is the problem this editorial confronts.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

A granted right, a deferred delivery

The 106th Amendment is unambiguous that one-third of seats will be reserved. What it makes conditional is the timing. By chaining implementation to a census and then a delimitation, the law converts a settled principle into a contingent promise. The longer that chain, the wider the gap between the right on paper and the seats in the House.

The trigger is the wrong hostage

There is no logical necessity binding the quota to delimitation. Reserving one-third of existing seats, by rotation or by a transparent rule, does not require the total number of seats to be redrawn first. Delimitation answers a different question, how seats are distributed across states, whereas the quota answers who occupies a share of them. Fusing the two lets an unrelated and politically sensitive exercise gate a gender-justice reform.

The local precedent already works

India has run a one-third reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities for three decades under the 73rd and 74th Amendments, with several states going to 50 per cent. That system operates through rotation of reserved seats without waiting on any delimitation. It proves the mechanism is workable at scale.

QUESTION	DELIMITATION ANSWERS	WOMEN'S QUOTA ANSWERS
Core issue	How seats are distributed across states	Who occupies one-third of the seats
Trigger needed	A fresh census	None inherent; rotation rule suffices
Local precedent	Not applicable	73rd and 74th Amendments, working for decades
Political sensitivity	High (north-south balance)	Broad cross-party consensus in 2023

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Separate the **substantive** right from the procedural trigger, and ask whether the trigger is genuinely necessary or merely attached. Many reforms stall not because the principle is contested but because implementation is bundled with an unrelated, contentious step. The analytical move is to test the linkage: would the reform be impossible without the trigger, or is the trigger a convenient postponement? Here, the panchayat precedent shows the quota can run without delimitation, which means the linkage is a choice, not a compulsion. Weigh the cost of delay, a generation of women under-represented, against the stated reason for it, and the case for decoupling follows. Keep this distinct from the arithmetic of delimitation itself; the focus is freeing the quota from that clock.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

106th Amendment reserves one-third seats -> implementation tied to delimitation -> delimitation tied to first census after 2026 -> census and delimitation delayed -> quota postponed indefinitely -> decouple quota from delimitation -> apply rotation like panchayats -> women's representation advanced now

WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Decouple the quota from delimitation:** amend or interpret the implementation clause so the one-third reservation applies to existing seats through a transparent rotation, without waiting for a fresh delimitation.
- ❷ **Borrow the panchayat mechanism:** adopt the tested rotation model of the 73rd and 74th Amendments, which has delivered women's representation at the local level for three decades without any delimitation trigger.
- ❸ **Fix a firm commencement date:** set a clear, near-term date for the reservation to take effect, converting an open-ended promise into an enforceable timeline.
- ❹ **Complete the census and delimitation on their own track:** proceed with the census and delimitation for their proper purpose of seat distribution, but do not let their timing gate the women's quota.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

This connects to the 2019 GS2 question on the role of women and women's organisations, the 2023 discussion around the women's reservation, and recurring questions on the 73rd and 74th Amendments, delimitation, and the representation of marginalised groups in legislatures.

Practice question: The women's reservation under the 106th Amendment should not be held hostage to a delayed delimitation. Critically examine the case for decoupling the quota from the census-and-delimitation trigger, drawing on the experience of local self-government. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: The Indian Express, PRS Legislative Research, Election Commission of India

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