



India 2026: One Nation, One Destiny — Sustainability, Social Justice, and Women's Empowerment as Pillars of National Renewal

Sonia Rajput

ABSTRACT

As India approaches 2026, it stands at a pivotal juncture, characterized by a growing youth demographic and increasing global prominence. The nation faces significant developmental imperatives. This paper examines the concept of 'One Nation, One Destiny' through four critical lenses: environmental stewardship, equitable inclusion, and women's empowerment. These pillars are deeply rooted in the Indian Constitution and the country's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals. Achieving India's full potential is contingent upon addressing these interconnected aspects ensuring fairness, environmental protection, and gender equality. Challenges such as energy consumption patterns, caste and class disparities, and gender inequality present both obstacles and opportunities for transformative change. Drawing on data from the National Family Health Survey, the Economic Survey of 2023-2024, and the SDG India Index, this analysis demonstrates the intrinsic link between environmental care, social inclusion, and women's participation in shaping India's future. The paper concludes by advocating for a unified vision for India in 2026, one that fosters collective aspiration for fairness, environmental well-being, and individual prosperity, thereby reinforcing the profound significance of 'One Nation, One Destiny' for the nation and its people.

1. INTRODUCTION: THE IDEA OF ONE NATION, ONE DESTINY

India's emergence as one of the world's most populous nations and its goal to become a developed economy by 2047 or 'Viksit Bharat' is both exciting and a big challenge. The idea of "One Nation, One Destiny" gives hope for a country working together where progress is not limited by state borders, caste, class or gender. A question arises: whose future are we talking about, and on what terms? The Indian Constitution promises economic and political progress along with freedom and equality. This statement signifies; they are the foundation of India's future. In 2026, as India hosts the G20 Legacy Forum and works on its Climate Action Plan, these promises become more important. This paper has four parts, and it starts by looking at taking care of the environment as a shared responsibility. Then it talks about justice and



equality as key to India's strength. Next, it examines women's empowerment as crucial for progress. Finally, it brings these elements together for a vision of India's future.

2. ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY: OUR SHARED DESTINY

India is simultaneously one of the world's largest greenhouse gas emitters and one of its most climate-vulnerable nations. According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC, 2023), India's total greenhouse gas emissions stood at approximately 3.1 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2019, representing roughly 7% of worldwide totals. Yet the country's per capita emissions remain among the lowest of major economies, reflecting deep structural inequities in the global climate order.

India's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), updated under the Paris Agreement in 2022, commit to achieving 50% of cumulative electric power capacity from non-fossil fuel-based energy sources by 2030 and reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% over 2005 levels (MoEFCC, 2022). Progress is already visible through India's renewable energy expansion, with over 180 GW of installed renewable capacity by 2023 signals meaningful progress (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2023).

However, environmental responsibility in the Indian context extends beyond carbon metrics. India is home to 18% of the world's population but possesses only 4% of its freshwater resources (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2021). Issues such as water stress, land degradation, and biodiversity loss disproportionately affect India's agrarian communities, Scheduled Tribes, and coastal population groups already marginalised by historical inequities. The relationship between ecology and social justice is therefore not incidental but structural.

NITI Aayog's SDG India Index 2023–24 records India's overall SDG score at 71 out of 100, with SDG 13 (Climate Action) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) remaining areas needing stronger attention (NITI Aayog, 2024). The index highlights that states with higher tribal and marginalised populations, such as Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, score lower on environmental sustainability indicators, underscoring that environmental degradation and social disadvantage are co-produced phenomena.

For India 2026, an ecologically responsible destiny calls for a Just Transition: one that decarbonises the economy without displacing coal-dependent communities, that conserves



forests while respecting Adivasi land rights, and that manages water without worsening rural-urban divides. Environmental responsibility, in this sense, is inseparable from social solidarity.

3. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY AS NATIONAL STRENGTH

A country is really strong when it takes care of its vulnerable people, not just its rich and powerful ones. India is a diverse place with many different castes, religions, languages and regions, which can make it hard for some people to feel included. The government has tried to make things fairer through laws and programs that help people who are disadvantaged, but there is still a lot of work to be done.

The Socio-Economic and Caste Census and other data show that certain groups, like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are still struggling with things like education, health and jobs. For example, the National Family Health Survey found that children from these groups are more likely to die young, and women from these groups are less likely to be able to read and write.

The numbers are really shocking: children from these groups are twice as likely to die before they are five years old as the average Indian child. Women from these groups are also less likely to be able to read and write: they are about 20 percentage points behind the average Indian woman.

The difference between poor people in India is also very big. The top 10% of earners in India make a significant amount of money, while the bottom 50% make very little. This is not just unfair. It also makes it harder for people to get along and for the government to make good decisions.

- i. The World Inequality Database says that the top 10% of earners in India make about 57% of the country's income.
- ii. The bottom 50% of earners, on the other hand, make only about 13% of the country's total income.

India is also a democracy, which means that there are ways for people to make their voices heard and for the government to make things fairer. Programs like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and the National Education Policy are trying to help people get jobs and get an education.



For instance, the National Education Policy says that children should be able to learn in their language, which could make a big difference for kids who are the first in their family to go to school.

Making things fairer is not just the thing to do, it is also good for the country as a whole. When everyone has access to healthcare and education, the country is stronger and more prosperous. India should keep investing in these things because it will pay off in the long run. The International Monetary Fund has found that countries with inequality tend to have more stable economies. So, India should keep working to make sure everyone has access to healthcare, education and legal help because it is an investment in the country's future.

4. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FOR A STRONGER NATION

No vision of what India should be can make sense if it leaves out half of the people who live in India. Women make up 48.5 % of India's population, but they are still not fully part of the economy, politics and society because of old-fashioned ideas about men being in charge, gaps in the law and not enough infrastructure. The World Economic Forum said in its 2024 report that India is 129th out of 146 countries when it comes to treating men and women, which is not what India wants to be.

The NFHS-5 data show that more women can read and write now, with 70.3 % of women being able to do so, but only 25.1% of women have jobs, which is one of the lowest numbers among big economies. This means that women are not able to contribute to the economy as much as they could. If women were treated equally India's economy could be \$770 billion by 2025, according to the McKinsey Global Institute. This will not happen unless things change in a big way.

The 106th Constitutional Amendment Act, which was passed in 2023, is a deal because it says that 33 % of the seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies must be reserved for women. This is a change, and it is not just about having women in politics; it is about having people who care about things like health, sanitation and education. Women who are part of governments have shown that they can make a big difference in these areas.

India's Self-Help Group movement is also very important, with over 12 million groups and 139 million women working together to improve their lives. These groups have shown that when women work together, they can do things. The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana. National Rural



Livelihoods Mission has helped these groups by giving them access to loans, training and markets, which is a great way to help women.

Violence against women is still a big problem. In 2021, there were over 4.45 lakh cases of crime against women. This number is probably much higher because many cases are not reported. Laws like the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act and the POSH Act are important. They need to be enforced strongly, especially in rural areas.

Women's empowerment is about being able to make choices about their bodies, having a job and being independent, having a say in politics and being safe from violence. For India to be an innovative and fair country in 2026, it needs to have women who are empowered and able to contribute to society. Women's empowerment is not something that would be pleasant to have; it is necessary for India's future.

5. SYNTHESISING THE PILLARS: AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR INDIA 2026

The three dimensions we are looking at are responsibility, social justice and women's empowerment. These things are connected to each other. They are not separate.

Environmental responsibility, social justice and women's empowerment are like pieces of a puzzle. They fit together. Women in India are really affected by water scarcity and forest degradation. The Dalit and Adivasi communities have to deal with a lot of problems. They do not cause a lot of harm. They have to face the bad effects. Economic inequality is also a problem. It gives a lot of power to some people. This makes it hard to make changes to help the environment and society. The United Nations has a plan called the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This plan says we should not leave anyone behind. India's SDG Voluntary National Review for 2023 says we need to work on a thing. We need to make sure everyone is equal, reduce inequalities, and take action on climate change. To do this, India needs to make some changes by 2026.

Firstly, we need to make sure our budget for the environment helps women. This means giving money to women who are the heads of their households and to female farmers.

Furthermore, we need to make sure our environmental policies are fair to all communities. We need to recognize that Adivasi communities are good at taking care of the environment.

Also, we need to make sure everyone has access to necessities like food and healthcare. This should not depend on whether they have a job or not.



Lastly, we need to make sure our country's voice is heard on issues like gender and climate change. The idea of One Nation One Destiny is not about everyone being the same. It is about working towards a common goal. Every Indian, regardless of their gender, caste, religion or where they are from, should be part of this journey. We should all work together to make sustainable justice. Empowered future, for environmental responsibility, social justice and women's empowerment. This is a journey we take together, not a destination where some people arrive, and others watch.

6. CONCLUSION

India is at an important time in its history in 2026. The country has a lot of hopes and dreams that are part of the idea of "One Nation, One Destiny". India can only make these dreams come true if it faces its big problems like taking care of the environment, making sure everyone is treated fairly and stopping unfair treatment of women. These things are all important for the country to move forward. We need to ensure that our institutions are strong, from how we handle money for the environment to how we make sure women have rights.

We also need to think about the values and beliefs that have shaped our country and who belongs here. The Constitution of India gives us a sense of what's right and wrong. Now we need to make sure that all 1.4 billion people can live with dignity and respect. India needs to make its vision a reality for all Indians in 2026 and, after that. The destiny of a nation is ultimately the aggregate of the destinies it creates for its most marginalised. In pursuing a shared future, India must ensure that its most vulnerable are not merely beneficiaries of development, but its architects.

REFERENCES

- Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2022). World inequality report 2022. World Inequality Lab. <https://wir2022.wid.world/>
- Chattopadhyay, R., & Duflo, E. (2004). Women as policy makers: Evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India. *Econometrica*, 72(5), 1409–1443. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0262.2004.00539.x>
- Government of India. (2023). India voluntary national review 2023: Decade of action — Transforming India. NITI Aayog. <https://www.niti.gov.in>



- International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS). (2021). National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019–21: India report (Vols. I & II). Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. <http://rchiips.org/nfhs/nfhs5.shtml>
- International Monetary Fund. (2020). World economic outlook, October 2020: A long and difficult ascent. IMF. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO>
- International Renewable Energy Agency. (2023). Renewable capacity statistics 2023. IRENA. <https://www.irena.org/publications/2023/Mar/Renewable-capacity-statistics-2023>
- McKinsey Global Institute. (2015). The power of parity: Advancing women's equality in India. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality>
- Ministry of Education. (2020). National Education Policy 2020. Government of India. <https://www.education.gov.in/nep>
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. (2022). India's updated nationally determined contribution. Government of India. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-08/India%20Updated%20First%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%2021-2030.pdf>
- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. (2023). Biennial update report-4 of India to the UNFCCC. Government of India. <https://moef.gov.in>
- Ministry of Rural Development. (2023). Annual report 2022–23: Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Rural Livelihoods Mission. Government of India. <https://aajeevika.gov.in>
- National Crime Records Bureau. (2022). Crime in India 2021: Statistics volume I. Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. <https://ncrb.gov.in>
- NITI Aayog. (2024). SDG India Index and dashboard 2023–24. Government of India. <https://sdgindiaindex.niti.gov.in>
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2021). Making peace with nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity and pollution emergencies. UNEP. <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>
- World Bank. (2023). Female labour force participation rate — India [Data file]. World Development Indicators. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS?locations=IN>
- World Economic Forum. (2024). Global gender gap report 2024. WEF. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2024>