

Social Justice: Definition, Concept, Concerns and Issues

(15 Marks Answer)

Introduction

Social justice is one of the most important concepts in social work. It refers to a fair and equal distribution of resources, rights, and opportunities among all members of society. It means that every person — regardless of their caste, religion, gender, disability, or economic status — deserves to be treated with dignity and has the right to live a decent life.

Definition

United Nations (UN): Social justice is *"an underlying principle for peaceful and prosperous coexistence within and among nations"* based on equality, solidarity, and respect for human rights.

NASW (National Association of Social Workers): *"Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities."*

In simple words — social justice means **no one should suffer simply because of who they are or where they were born.**

Concept of Social Justice

The concept of social justice is built on five core principles — remembered by the trick **EAP R(HR) D:**

- **E — Equity:** Giving people what they *need*, not the same thing to everyone. A poor family needs more support than a rich one.
- **A — Access:** Everyone must be able to actually reach and use services like education, healthcare, and food — not just have them available on paper.
- **P — Participation:** Every person must have a voice in decisions that affect their life — in government, community programs, and social policies.
- **R(HR) — Human Rights:** Every person has basic rights — dignity, liberty, education, safety — simply by being human.
- **D — Diversity:** Every person's background — caste, religion, gender, culture — must be respected and included, not discriminated against.

Social justice is not just about charity — it is about **changing systems and structures** that create inequality in the first place. It is about making society fair for everyone, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

Concerns and Issues of Social Justice

Despite the ideal of social justice, many serious problems exist in society that prevent it from becoming a reality. These are called **concerns and issues of social justice**.

1. ● Poverty and Economic Inequality

Poverty is one of the biggest threats to social justice. When people do not have enough money, they cannot access food, education, healthcare, or housing. The gap between the rich and the poor keeps growing, while the poor remain trapped in a cycle of deprivation.

Example: In rural India, a daily wage labourer earns ₹300 per day. When he falls sick, he cannot afford hospital treatment and loses his job. His children drop out of school to earn money. The cycle of poverty continues from one generation to the next. Social justice demands that this cycle be broken through fair wages, social security, and equal opportunity.

2. ● Caste Discrimination

Despite laws against it, caste-based discrimination remains a serious concern in Indian society. People from lower castes — especially Dalits — face exclusion from education, employment, public spaces, and social life. This is a direct violation of social justice.

Example: A Dalit child is made to sit separately in a classroom, given different utensils in the mid-day meal, and denied entry to the village temple. Even though the Right to Education and anti-discrimination laws exist, the social reality remains deeply unjust. A social worker intervenes by counseling the school, raising community awareness, and connecting the family to legal support.

3. ● Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women

Women and girls continue to face discrimination in education, employment, property rights, and decision-making. Gender-based violence — including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and child marriage — is a major social justice concern.

Example: A 16-year-old girl is pulled out of school and married off because her family believes “girls don’t need education.” She has no say in the decision. This violates her right to education, freedom, and dignity. A social worker can intervene by counseling the family, reporting to child protection authorities, and connecting the girl to government schemes like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao.

4. ● Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities often face exclusion from education, employment, and public spaces. Society tends to treat them with pity rather than respect, denying them equal opportunities and participation.

Example: A young man with a physical disability is qualified and skilled, but repeatedly rejected in job interviews because employers assume he “cannot perform.” Public buildings have no ramps, buses have no accessibility features, and no one consults him in community decisions. Social justice demands that he be treated as an equal citizen with full rights. A social worker advocates for inclusive hiring, disability-friendly infrastructure, and his right to participation.

5. ● Communal and Religious Discrimination

People from minority religious communities often face prejudice, social exclusion, and even violence. Their access to jobs, housing, and justice is often limited due to majority bias — this is a deep concern for social justice.

Example: A Muslim family in a city is repeatedly denied house rentals by landlords who refuse to rent to minorities. Their children face bullying in school. Despite being law-abiding citizens, they are treated as outsiders. Social justice requires that every person, regardless of religion, has equal access to housing,

education, and security. A social worker can connect them to legal aid, anti-discrimination bodies, and community mediation.

6. ● Child Labour and Exploitation of Children

Thousands of children in India are forced to work in hazardous conditions — in factories, hotels, brick kilns, and homes — instead of going to school. This is both a violation of human rights and a social justice concern, as it is mostly children from poor and marginalized families who are affected.

Example: A 10-year-old boy from a poor migrant family works 12 hours a day in a tea stall, serving customers, washing dishes, and sleeping on the floor. He has never been to school. This child is being denied his right to education, safety, and childhood. Social justice demands his rescue, rehabilitation, and reintegration into school. A social worker reports the case, connects the family to livelihood programs, and enrolls the child in school.

7. ● Displacement and Rights of Tribal Communities

Tribal and indigenous communities are often displaced from their land in the name of development — dams, mines, industries. They lose their homes, livelihoods, culture, and identity, with little or no compensation or participation in the decision.

Example: A tribal village in Jharkhand is forcefully relocated to build a dam. The families are promised compensation but receive very little. They are moved to unfamiliar land with no forest, no farming knowledge applicable there, and no social support. Their children stop going to school. Their culture and community bonds collapse. Social justice requires that development must not come at the cost of the most vulnerable. Social workers advocate for their rights, proper rehabilitation, and inclusion in decision-making.

8. ● Lack of Access to Healthcare for the Poor

Quality healthcare is largely unavailable or unaffordable for the poor. Public health systems are weak, and private hospitals are expensive. This means that illness pushes poor families deeper into poverty — a classic social justice failure.

Example: A poor woman in a village suffers from tuberculosis. The government hospital is 40 km away, she has no transport, and she doesn't know about free TB treatment. She takes local remedies, her condition worsens, and she eventually dies — a completely preventable death. Social justice demands that every person has access to quality healthcare regardless of their income or location. Social workers bridge this gap by spreading awareness, connecting people to schemes, and arranging support.

Conclusion

Social justice is not simply an ideal — it is a necessity for a peaceful, equal, and dignified society. The concerns and issues discussed above — poverty, caste discrimination, gender inequality, disability exclusion, religious prejudice, child labour, displacement, and healthcare denial — all reflect how far society still is from achieving true social justice.

Social workers play a critical role in addressing these issues by **advocating, empowering, linking, and educating** — working at both individual and systemic levels to build a more just world.

💡 **Remember:** Social justice is achieved not when the privileged are brought down, but when the marginalized are lifted up.