

Role of Social Worker in Promoting Social Justice

Social justice is one of the core values and foundations of social work profession. It means ensuring that every person in society gets equal rights, equal opportunities, and fair treatment — regardless of their caste, gender, religion, income, or social status.

In a country like India, where inequalities based on caste, class, gender, and religion are deeply rooted, the role of a social worker in promoting social justice becomes even more important and meaningful.

A social worker is not just a helper — they are an agent of change. Social workers operate across **micro** (individual), **mezzo** (community), and **macro** (structural/policy) levels, making them uniquely positioned to address injustice from multiple fronts simultaneously. Role of Social worker is discussed below in more detail

1. Advocacy for Rights

Advocacy is arguably the most fundamental role of a social worker in the pursuit of justice. Social workers act as spokespersons for those whose voices are systematically silenced by structures of power. They challenge discriminatory policies, institutional neglect, and legal violations.

Example: A social worker supporting inter-state migrant labourers denied minimum wages may file complaints with the Labour Department, engage trade unions, and invoke the Interstate Migrant Workmen Act (1979).

2. Empowerment and Capacity Building

One of the most important roles of a social worker in promoting social justice is to empower individuals and communities — especially those who are weak, marginalized, or oppressed.

Empowerment means helping people realize their own strengths, rights, and abilities so that they can take control of their own lives and fight for justice themselves.

Capacity Building means developing the skills, knowledge, and confidence of individuals and communities so they can stand up for their rights and solve their own problems.

Example: A social worker who organises rural women into SHGs does not simply provide financial resources; she creates a space for collective decision-making, leadership development, and solidarity. Over time, these women challenge patriarchal structures within their homes and communities. Empowerment, in this sense, is both economic and political.

3. Combating Caste, Gender, and Class Discrimination

India is a diverse country, but it is also a country where caste, gender, and class-based discrimination have existed for centuries. These forms of discrimination create deep inequalities in society and violate the basic principles of social justice. A social worker plays a crucial role in identifying, challenging, and eliminating these forms of discrimination.

Example: When a Dalit family is denied access to a common water source in a village — a situation not uncommon in rural India — a social worker may mobilise community members, invoke protections under the **SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989**, and ensure legal remedies.

4. Facilitating Access to Welfare Schemes

In India, the government has launched many welfare schemes and programmes for the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable sections of society. However, the people who need these schemes the most are often unaware, uneducated, or unable to access them due to bureaucratic barriers, corruption, language problems, or lack of documents. Social workers bridge this implementation gap.

Example: Helping an elderly widow in a remote village complete the documentation for the **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)** is not a clerical act — it is an act of social justice.

5. Policy Advocacy and Social Reform

Policy Advocacy means raising voice, presenting evidence, and putting pressure on governments and institutions to create, change, or implement policies that promote justice and equality for all.

Social Reform means working towards changing harmful social customs, beliefs, and practices that cause injustice and inequality in society.

Example: A social worker collected data on domestic workers' exploitation, joined hands with NGOs, and pressured the government through media campaigns — which contributed to discussions around the **Domestic Workers Regulation Bill**.

6. Human Rights Protection

A social worker acts as a defender of human rights. They ensure that every person — especially the poor, marginalized, and vulnerable — gets their basic rights like the right to life, education, health, food, and dignity.

Example: A social worker found that tribal families were being forcefully displaced from their land without compensation. They documented the cases, approached a legal aid organization, and filed a PIL in court — ensuring the tribals got their rights back.

7. Social Awareness and Attitudinal Change

Structural injustice is sustained not only by law and economics, but by culture and belief. Social workers engage in behaviour change communication to shift harmful social norms — around child marriage, female foeticide, disability stigma, and mental illness.

Example: A campaign against child marriage in Rajasthan that reduces the marriage of girls under 18. Lasting social justice requires changing mindsets, not just rules.

8. Crisis Intervention and Equitable Relief

A social worker plays a vital role during times of crisis — such as natural disasters, communal violence, poverty emergencies, or personal tragedies. They ensure that relief and support reaches everyone equally — especially those who are most vulnerable and often left out.

Crisis Intervention means taking immediate action to help people who are in a state of emergency or breakdown.

Equitable Relief means ensuring that aid and resources are distributed fairly and justly — giving more support to those who need it most.

Conclusion

The role of social workers in promoting social justice is not supplementary — it is central to the profession's identity. Operating across micro, mezzo, and macro levels, social workers challenge inequalities that are structural, cultural, and institutional in origin. They do not merely redistribute resources; they work toward **restructuring power relations**, which is the deeper demand of social justice.