



Towards the Greening of Social Work Practice

Dr. Venkat Pulla¹

University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia.

Since social work's emergence as a profession there has been a sustained interest in the metaphor of 'person-in-environment'. In reality, however, to date, despite the frequent use of the term 'environment', social work literature remains largely silent on ecological domains (nature) as being a fundamental aspect of 'environment'. This paper reviews social work writings that address the nexus between ecological concerns and social work as a profession towards identifying the emerging environmental consciousness and its contribution to what this paper identifies as 'green social work thinking'. Where social workers have responded to environmental issues it appears that this has been a result of strong social justice motivations, most commonly seen in the community development sector. An integrated approach to these emergent issues between environmental activism and especially social work education is absent. When it comes to disasters and natural calamities, social work appears to be at the forefront of immediate relief efforts by working alongside emergency service personnel or by providing trauma and emotional support counselling. In some instances they have also participated in surveys of the aftermath of those calamities. Despite this involvement, very rarely have social workers, individually or as a profession, raised issues about human and non-human environment interaction, especially the ethics of human's' exploitation of nature. This paper identifies the themes and emerging professional values and challenges confronting social work education and practice which may hold the key to the way forward for the profession in a world where ecological issues are taking centre stage.

¹ Dr Venkat Pulla is Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the School of Social Sciences, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore DC, Qld 4558 Australia. Email: vpulla@usc.edu.au; der.venkat.pulla@gmail.com



Introduction

Throughout the world there have been some social workers who have espoused or been involved in environmental causes and who strive to ameliorate environmental degradation that negatively impacts on the poor and other vulnerable populations. However, their involvement appears to have been due to exceptional circumstances or in response to their personal frameworks. These social workers can be called 'green social workers', although this is perhaps a homely descriptor and is not akin to the nature of social work this paper strives to identify. An example I wish to cite: the 1984 Union Carbide disaster in Bhopal, India. This has resulted in my students and I becoming involved in the aftermath of a major ecological disaster which left nearly 9,000 dead and several thousand permanently blinded and disabled. My students and I were catapulted into 'environmental social work' by taking responsibility for assessing the Bhopal community's immediate recovery needs in the aftermath of the gas tragedy.

Following the Bhopal disaster there was a series of actions and reflective conversations which led to an urban citizens' movement in Hyderabad – my home city. This came about through an alliance of concerned citizens (journalists, social workers, affected citizens and scientists from the establishment) who, using the Bhopal experience, decided to look at the city of Hyderabad for 'potential Bhopals'. The resulting report: *Hyderabad: The State of Art of Physical Environment, a Citizens' Report-1985* (Pulla, Jaffri, & Rao, 1985) was the first of its kind in the Asian city. It articulated a framework for identifying potential environmental disasters in every city as well as a series of preventative strategies.

My involvement in the Bhopal aftermath and the Hyderabad report caused me to confront the reality of a potential threat arising from poorly monitored industrial activities with the capacity to jeopardise the safety of whole communities and natural eco-systems. This has shaped my thinking and social work practice in the ensuing 30 years, regardless of practice contexts. Post Bhopal, a social work colleague, Nisha Rao took environment education into schools and promoted environmental sensitization programmes at all levels. Her work has been widely recognised and supported by Indian and international donor agencies as well as from the Ministry of Environment, Government of India, recommended by the Indian Prime Minister's office.

Another social work academic from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Ms. Medha Patkar took up the cause of involuntary displacement of indigenous people in response to major water projects. She has, for the last thirty years championed environmental causes, social justice, poverty issues and the rights of the indigenous population – in the shaping of major development projects (Pawar & Pulla, 2012).

The above Indian-based personal examples are used to highlight that most of social work's spontaneous and sporadic involvement in environmental disasters remains largely an expression of individual commitment and enthusiasm. Be it floods in Bangladesh or the tsunamis that keep rocking the rest of the world, it would be important to note that social workers do great crisis work and have always participated in front line services in the aftermath of bushfires, and flood and droughts. Similarly their record with victims of war and refugees in trauma and torture counselling equally receives positive mention. This involvement is from a reactive not proactive perspective, which removes the potential to influence or shape social policy to protect the human and natural environment – especially the over-exploitation of the natural environment.



Social work practice has a global history of sustained interest in people and environment, but in reality this interest to date is devoid of any pronounced interest in the ecological domain and human interactions within the environment, and this is despite social work's penchant with 'person-in-environment' metaphor (McKinnon, 2008; Jones, 2010). Social work writings in the last two decades point to the level of neglect of ecological domain barring a few authors and that a more fully developed, expanded ecological orientation was needed in social work (Besthorn, 2000; Coates, 2003a; McKinnon, 2010). This author sees an opportunity for the profession, as one that subscribes to the perspective of 'person-in-environment', to expand and develop a green social work paradigm as part of its core philosophy and best practice.

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2012) identifies a clear link between social work ethics in terms of our obligation to challenge unjust policies and practices, and to seek solutions based on solidarity. An example is 19th and early 20th century campaigns where the early social workers joined with others to advocate for improvements in public health and the built-environment, such as housing and public spaces. They clearly saw a connection between social issues and ecology.

The literature reveals that, in recent years, social workers appear to have been mainly pre-occupied with people's social environment rather than the natural environment. This raises the question: Does the gulf between environmental activism and social work result partly from a lack of an enabling ethos to connect them? Or is it due to an archetypal understanding that an environmental focus is largely conservation-oriented and that social work is focused on the 'social' issues *in* the environment.

There is a need for a dialogue that expands the professional position on environmental issues as the profession continues to work with the poor and the marginalised peoples who are affected significantly by the adverse changes in their habitats. A further impetus to re-focus social work in the environmental context is also reflected in a statement from the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) that addresses the requirements for a stable world order to include mutual recognition of human rights, a more equitable economic order, the enforcement of world treaties on a sustainable environment, and a more determined search for non-violent solutions to national and international conflicts (IFSW, 2012).

The main objectives of this paper are: to review social work literature which attempts to share social work skills and knowledge context in the environmental arena and other writings that evidently suggest a much wider involvement of the social work role allowing the profession to recognise emerging environmental consciousness and its contribution to deepening the social work profession's environmental focus. The paper would also endeavour to delineate the values on which a new paradigm in social work may evolve to contribute to the process of the greening of social work.

Reviewing the dominant model of economic development

There are numerous writings on the model of economic development dominant in Western thinking. The critical reviews of the current model are based on the effects that the model appeared to have, resulting in unequal patterns of industrial growth and high rates of consumption and production. The model of development which is predicated on creating a continuous flow of goods for human consumption, to benefit a few people, has not only



pervaded the affluent West but also had a global effect (Coates, 2005; Eisler, 1995; Korten, 2006; Mary, 2008; McKibben, 2007; Mosher, 2010; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers, 1999).

Western societies have clearly advanced in environmental regulation through pollution control and waste management. Those countries have designated dumping grounds to treat their waste or have negotiated waste management options with Third World countries. Many Third World nations have adopted the same development model – seeking higher growth while jeopardising environmental integrity – and this is reflected in the paucity of pollution management and the establishment of waste management control. The prioritising of economic gain (development model) over environmental protection and sustainability within Western 19th and 20th century societies is being replicated, largely unabated, in Third World countries with, as in the Bhopal example, disastrous effects on human safety and the natural environment.

Ironically, the Western model of development also ushers the unloading of goods and commodities of destructive lifestyle habits such as drugs and tobacco trade, amongst others, into the developing world. Once again it appears as yet another glaring example of shifting environmental and health hazards from one region to the other. Throughout the world high economic growth has resulted in consumption patterns that are often equated to happiness, and this temporal happiness in turn has brought in new values of ruthless competition, a high level of individualism and increased attraction to materialism. The term ‘homo economicus’, means that economic well-being is primary and leads to well-being in other aspects of life. A healthy economy according to the dominant model of development is described as an expanding economy in which more material goods are produced, consumed and thrown away (Clark, 1989).

Besthorn (2011) writes that ‘the inevitable consequence of this pattern of development is growing economic, social and political imbalance between diverse sectors of the world’s societies and callous exploitation of nature as well as fellow beings for the benefit of the dominant classes’. He also stated that human values such as ‘human compassion, tender-heartedness and unhesitating cooperation are put aside for wanton proclivities toward exclusion and personal advantage’ (Besthorn, 2011; Global Alliance for a Deep Ecological Social Work, 2011). The following table (Table 1) exemplifies the inherent dominance of Western economic thinking, which to date has gone largely unchallenged with regard to the exploitation of the natural environment.

Table 1: *Dominant model of economic development*

Franchised Outcomes	Disenfranchised Outcomes
Application of technology and human capacity	Less privileged people disproportionately vulnerable Toxic pollution, related health costs, escalating energy costs, global climate change
Sense of entitlement increased consumption of natural resources	Industrial societies exploiting low wage work forces Effects of ‘hurricanes and tsunamis on poor
Rise in standard of living Access to material goods Better medical care, life span increases Agriculture, nanotechnology genetics	Values such as individualism, separatism and domination resulting in violence, warfare, economic crisis, inequitable costs of health Return to Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest, leading to fear of competition and fear of risk



Social work literature has criticised the current model of development as being conducive to rampant growth of individualism and separatism, related to dualism. People prioritise individual needs over group or family needs, and this is further reflected by people preferring private property over community property (Coates, 2005; Bourne, 2008; Donahue, 2001; Mosher, 2010). This in turn also provides the necessary impulsion to remain self-centred, causing human beings to value human needs above those of the natural world and go to the extent of making clear distinctions between the needs of the dominant communities over the needs of the less dominant communities. This tendency of humans to see themselves as separate from nature possibly accounts for human society's measures in justification and exploitation of nature. This is an area of concern for human values where a balanced ecosystems perspective in social work may be pitched (Coates, 2003a; 2003b; Norton, 2009).

The literature also refutes the suggestion that economic progress and consumption of material goods has brought an increase in human wellbeing and personal happiness (Lappe, 2006). Mosher (2010) takes an example from the food industry where, for instance, large food producers and corporations drive away smaller local producers through price cutting, despite the better quality of the locally produced food. The corporate giants utilise bulk production techniques, driven by business efficiency criteria such as lower costs of production and higher return of profits to sweep over the markets. Thus, in a Darwinian notion of 'survival of the fittest', fear of competition and fear of risk is creating a negative social outcome in this current model of development.

The dominant model in social work has always been the therapeutic model with implications for longstanding 'person-in-environment' that has arrived into social work via the medical settings. This model suggests that professionals can fix the problems with expert diagnosis and treatment. There is recognition in social work that suggests that the 'person-in-environment' model does not produce client or consumer empowerment and that this model is fixated on individual change focusing on solving problems by changing the individual, rather than affecting the scenarios where the problems occur, that is, the environment. Critics view this to be counterproductive to social development (Coates: 2003a, Coates & Gray, 2011; Mary, 2008; Zapf, 2009).

The profession of social work has always been concerned about mobilising and acting on behalf of communities that have been at risk of marginalisation or in poverty. Many contemporary environmental problems have resulted in people losing livelihoods due to the degradation of natural resources. Man-made pollution of waters due to discharge of industrial and domestic effluents or resultant adverse health issues due to toxic wastes have also caused grievous violation of human rights of the people living on the fringes of industrial estates throughout the world. In this context, it is pertinent to view the definition of social work as given by the International Federation of Social Workers, which states that the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. By utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (IFSW, 2012)

A number of emerging social work contributors have been asking for environmental agenda in social work (Jones, 2010, 2011; McKinnon, 2008, 2010). The existing binary approach to human-nature relationship, seeing itself as primarily concerned with people and issues of social



justice, while the environment and issues of ecological justice remain the concerns of others, outside of the profession, appears ironical. McKinnon suggests that, despite having a theoretical frame of reference to ecological social work, the term 'ecological' has in effect referred continuously to the socio-cultural environment and has largely ignored the natural world context in which social work practice takes place (McKinnon, 2008, 2010). The lack of attention paid in social work courses to topics such as sustainability or environmental issues, and environmental justice is well documented by previous literature reviews (Jones 2010, 2011; McKinnon, 2010; Molyneux, 2010).

The International Federation of Social Work–International Association of Schools of Social Work definition of social work states that social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments and that people the world over are rediscovering that a positive social environment is not possible without a sustainable natural environment.

Social Work and Environmental interface

While reviewing the materials for this paper the author found it useful to attempt a thematic classification. While this is not a conclusive exercise, what it provided for this paper is a framework that moves around a number of areas from where social work may be influenced. For example, questions such as: what is our learning from the indigenous peoples' beliefs? How is spirituality shaping social values and how does spirituality inform social work? How deep are the social work and interdisciplinary connections? What would an eco perspective mean to social work? and finally, Is there any thinking around the greening of social work and its values? While acknowledging the interconnectedness between these questions, an attempt is made to use the above questions in the review.

Learning from the indigenous peoples

A review of the more recent social work literature points to a growing conviction that the Western knowledge systems, ideologies, and social care models are becoming increasingly inappropriate and inadequate for addressing the major crises confronting our planet. Emerging literature also shows that social work ought to be addressing the ecological, spiritual, socio-economic and sustainability questions in our societies today (Gray, Coates, & Hetherington, 2007; Haug, 2005). The literature suggests that there is a major shift to examine what people in indigenous cultures could offer for our modern day crises. Of particular growing interest to social work academics are the indigenous people, their ecology, and their spirituality. The fundamental persuasion for this view appears to arise from the impacts of the eco-spiritual belief systems held amongst indigenous communities all over the world. For example, most indigenous cultures believe that the earth is sacred. This belief is upheld by Hindus, Buddhists and other spiritualists and religious persuasions.

The intimate and respectful relationship between human beings and nature held in aboriginal societies has resulted in a spiritual consciousness based on survival needs and a belief in people's responsibility to live in harmony with Earth's resources. This fundamental view of Earth as sacred living thing is important to many indigenous peoples (Gray, et al., 2013). Literature points to the factual uniqueness of indigenous world views and their traditions that explains their symbiotic relationship to the earth and beliefs about the delicate balance of human beings in nature. The divide between humans and nature, placing human life over nature; divisions of humanity and animality – such dualisms and dichotomies are unknown to many indigenous peoples. The reluctance of indigenous people to latch onto the current model of development on one hand and their belief systems based on self-reliance and long-term sustainability on the



other appear to be the main reasons for their long-standing alienation from the Western models of development. A rich tapestry of writing has emerged in the indigenous development sector in the recent past that advocates for and assists in the development of indigenous models of social work.

The indigenous world views are intimate and respectful and clearly an indication of reverence and gratitude in their relationship to nature. In indigenous cultures their spiritual world and consciousness are based on the belief that nature provides for their survival needs, and a belief that each generation ought to take care of the earth's resources for the future generation. This spiritual understanding is also the main driver of their social and emotional well-being that allows for preservation and sustainability of the natural environment and their culture (Grieves, 2009; Zapf, 2005). The indigenous world view presents a tension with capitalist exploitation where the emphasis is to exploit Earth's resources to the maximum to serve human beings – a perspective that arises from the results from the dominant Western model of development. Social work needs to resolve this tension for the profession as we hope to continue to work with and for the indigenous communities. Several of these communities are part of the marginalised and the poor, and therefore the primary constituents for social work. In the future social work may need to determine its stance and bring forward a role that could emulate the environmental ethos that has been maintained by the indigenous communities for centuries.

Spirituality shaping social values

The symbiotic relationship to the earth and beliefs about the delicate balance of man in nature as referred to above provide the spiritual and moral context in which people search for meaning and happiness in their lives. If life is destroyed, ultimately human kind is destroyed (Ferreira, 2010). The focus on spirituality supports and encourages interdependence not only for people but also belonging to a society and the environment. Human survival and development depend on others and nature. Through them a human being becomes empowered (Ferreira, 2010). It is believed that such pursuits have the potential to shift values for the better. It is possible to perceive that such spiritual orientations could goad human beings to move away from high individualism and from the unbridled consumerism of the industrial context. It is said that when wanting more for oneself is shifted to equal sharing with one's family in the beginning and eventually becomes a habit of sharing with the larger community, then this could be perceived as shift in the right direction. Thus the value of everything for oneself is replaced by the value of everything for all (Elgin, 1998).

In practice this also implies that human beings would take from nature only what is required and leave the rest for others. Such practice also allows time for nature to rejuvenate. Such behavioural response displays 'self-awareness'. In the context of this paper 'self-awareness' is defined as a process that allows human beings to recognise their strengths to become fully aware of the uniqueness of human potential, and realise the true connection with nature and the universe.

Another way of explaining self-awareness would be to view the phenomenon as taking human beings closer to their 'inner self'. This paper submits that such self-awareness is a behavioural response that allows human beings to be more empathic towards fellow human beings. Self-awareness, also known as self-realisation, finds close explanations in Maslow's hierarchy of needs as self-actualisation that causes the awakening and manifestation of latent potentialities of the human being, for example, ethical, aesthetical and spiritual experiences (Maslow & Lowery, 1998). For the purpose of enhancing our understanding, this paper utilises explanations offered from philosophy and humanistic psychology, both of which complement each other in their



explanations of the concept of self-realisation and the concept self-actualisation (Tay & Diener, 2011). Human behaviour that results in sharing, caring and preserving nature beyond self is seen as a natural phenomenon by the world of humanist psychology (Maslow & Lowery, 1998), where such a demonstration is considered metaphysical in the realm of eastern philosophy. Writings in philosophy (Arka, 2010) also allude to the fact that self-realisation allows for the attaining of a describable clarity of life; offers increased ability to empathise with others; assists in the developing of conscious awareness about the purpose and meaning of life; adds abilities to access intuitive wisdom (Mosher, 2010); causes general well-being; promotes feelings of confidence, self-worth, inspiration and healing, and finally a desire to transform dreams into reality that can benefit others or humanity (Arka, 2010). According to Sacco, these very inner resources of wisdom within the self evoke compassion, peace, harmony and provide that symbiosis (Sacco, 1989; Ferreira, 2010).

Flowing on from the above, another major contribution of social work writings in the treatment of spirituality in social work is discussed. Despite its challenges, incorporation of a spiritual dimension as part of the foundation in social work emerges as a resurgent plea in the context of 'person-and-environment'. Many social work writers in the last two decades have clearly made a plea for spirituality to be considered as an ally in social work practice (Besthorn: 2003; 2011; Bingham, 2008, as cited in Mosher, 2010; Coates & Gray, 2011; Ferreira, 2010; Lysack, 2008; Norton, 2009; Mosher, 2010). Mosher (2010) clearly mentions that where the material and spiritual worlds are seen as interdependent the paradigm for development will be based on ideas about nature, community and spirituality. Consideration of the overarching capacity of the spiritual in the context of the ecological perspective has gained strength as it appears to contribute to the concept of unity, but shows capacity to weld humankind with nature from a spiritual and a practical point of view and also addresses our responsibility to the non-human world (Coates & Gray, 2011).

This symbiotic human and non-human interactional behaviour that is rooted in nature, community and spirituality is being described by several writers in different ways. Besthorn (2011) describes it as tender-heartedness and Bingham (2008, as cited in Mosher, 2010) refers to it as moral responsibility and philosopher Arka (2010) considers this as an inner spiritual journey where the human being takes 'a silent battle for balance between the logical mind and the loving heart', which by itself is an amazingly transformational and powerful process for the human being. It appears that that this growing awareness about innate human spirituality may be required in the central purpose and intervention of social work in order to inspire human society to undertake that journey from the realms of the mind to the realms of the heart. This appears as a highly transformational agenda for social work to embark upon, signalling that human empowerment is not externally related or dependent, but is certainly an act of heeding a call from within.

The review demonstrates that a whole new paradigm in social work is possible and could carry the main tenets of sustainability and gratefully acknowledging that the planet and universe are one unified system. Social work theorists such as Besthorn (2011) and Coates (2004) saw clearly the implications of degradation of the environment and explored the transcendent and spiritual value of informing social work theory and practice. The understanding of nature not only physically but also metaphysically implies a deeper connectedness with nature which lies beyond physical dependence, but includes a dimension of consciousness. Gray (2008) states that there is an urgent need for an outward focused eco-spiritual social work in which spirituality is "other" rather than self-centred. Thus a plea for including eco-spiritual consciousness in social work



discourse to advance the profession is echoed by several writers (Berry, 1988, 1999; Besthorn, 2002; Canda, 1998; Morrissette, McKenzie, & Morrissette, 1993; Earley, 1997; Gray, Coates, & Hetherington, 2007; Rifkin, 2009; Zapf, 2005).

In the suggestion of the eco-spiritual perspective there are clearly two implications: firstly long-term sustainability, that is, that resources from nature would not be drawn upon callously without consideration to the rights of future generations; and secondly, the belief in the unity of all, that is., the entire planet and universe are to be considered as one unified system. This understanding is required in social work practice and its inclusive perception of spiritual awareness. As the concept of unity is basic and found in many religious and spiritual persuasions across the globe, a better understanding of this phenomenon will account for better service delivery, as it would allow social work analysis to include cultural and religious variables of the clients that the profession serves (Canda & Furman 2010; Mosher, 2010).

Emergence of eco-perspectives

An area of major contributions in social work literature seems to be various ecological perspectives emerging from a number of persuasions: eco-feminism, eco-psychology, and deep ecology. Cox and Pawar (2006) consider holism and unity as offering respect for all life, and to intrinsic values within the natural world. An ecological perspective according to these allows for a strong display of conservation ethics that is balanced by diversity. The argument here is that humanity benefits from its diversity and so does nature. A further dimension to the importance of diversity within an overall unity is that of equilibrium as a condition of any system in which competing influences are balanced. Nature illustrates this abundantly.

Previously Russell (1994) suggested a basic definition of conservation that required provision of opportunities for flora and fauna to exist in nature, regardless of their perceived utility to humans. Thus the radical non-interventionist approach captured by the above definition has the capacity to scope the irrevocable damage done to nature, and a profession like social work may be able to recognise an opportunity for actions toward conservation in nature. Such ethical actions, this paper contends, are within the capabilities of the profession of social work.

Fred Besthorn, cited extensively in this paper, has been a serious contributor to ecological and social work literature in this decade, bringing an understanding of deep ecology originally propounded by a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess (1989). The concept and term “deep ecology” makes a clear distinction between superficial and deep approaches to environmental problems. Besthorn suggests that there is a difference between an environmental ethos that is superficially concerned with ecological problems because of their impact on human beings and one which is more deeply concerned with issues of ecological justice in humanity’s essential relationship with nature. It is the contention of this paper that Besthorn’s ideas from deep ecology have great potential to inform social work in a number of areas, including theory, curriculum development, policy initiative and ideas of social justice. Focusing at the level of client, Christine Norton (2011) in her definition of a client’s life space suggests that it ought to include the natural world in which he or she lives. To summarise the contribution of emerging ecological thinkers in social work, it can be said that they bring into social work a broadened understanding of humanity’s place in the interconnectedness of all existence and certainly a role for the practice of social work.

Need for interdisciplinary discourse



A focus that emerges clearly in the review of literature is the opportunity to consider interdisciplinary research to increase our understanding of environmental issues and thereafter to sharpen social work focus and intervention. In a most recent research project Lysack piloted bringing together diverse groups of scientists and leaders of faith communities with an intentional effort to build bridges and to increase awareness of the relevance of social work to environmental issues, and also to inform the others of the scope of social work (Lysack, 2011). A view that the profession of social work ought to become more comprehensive and work alongside political scientists, hydrologists, epidemiologists, sociologists and lawyers, amongst others, to bring forward a multidisciplinary approach to the environmental justice movement was raised in the recent past (Bullard & Wright, 2009).

There is also a contention that, irrespective of the discipline, environmental issues ought to be taught in every degree and more so in social work which is predominantly a practice-based profession. Similar views are also expressed by Coates and Gray (2011) when they suggest that social work academics ought to break free of their silos and work cooperatively or at least in unison with others to better understand and respond to the many dimensions of climate change and environmental destruction. Certainly in practice social workers have all along been working with people living in poverty in squatter settlements across the world, which necessitated their work in interdisciplinary teams with primary health, environmental sanitation, and children's education. However the habitat in which these squatter settlements and impoverishment flourished also requires orientation to and working with a range of other professionals such as architects, engineers, urban planners and industrial engineers. Additionally the requirements of teaching and training social workers require of the profession a more comprehensive definition of the natural world in which we work or the environment in which our clients live.

Thus a good fit education in social work that combines economic, environmental and social issues on one hand and a repertoire of skills to handle emerging issues and concerns on the other is definitely needed. This argument becomes crucial to an extent, and perhaps even overwhelming, for the profession as its practice can gain more than a cosmetic role in dealing with the symptoms and causes of environmental degradation. It is the contention of this paper that right now the social work profession has that opportunity to consider environmental issues and solutions and that an interdisciplinary outlook is not difficult for the profession to acquire. Coates and Gray (2011), while providing an overview of the field of environmental ethics in its search for a moral stance to affirm environmental social work, raise some fundamental questions: should social work be only concerned about its role when environmental concerns affect humans; and what should be the profession's duty, obligation and responsibility to the non-human world? These questions by far appear to be the most radical challenge posed to the profession of social work. Certainly they bring with them an opportunity to progress the social work discourses and will provide sufficient clarity towards a paradigm shift in social work practice that admits environmental concerns with deeper understanding of implied considerations.

The current review also reveals social perceptions of ecological destruction and the threat of global climate change as moral issues (Bingham, 2008, as cited in Mosher, 2010). Also there is a realisation that human beings due to their own folly of following wrong economic models are damaging the planet and therefore ought to assume moral responsibility to help resolve the problems (Mosher, 2010; Princen, 2005). Thus it can be argued that those cultures and societies which that see the moral imperatives also see the need to moderate lifestyles based on valuing sufficiency rather than always wanting more for themselves and for their kind. In most Third



World countries the minimalist welfare approach that mitigates dire needs can define the purpose of social workers. Simultaneously it must also be noted that due to the prevailing development model in the Western countries that continuously consume more resources, global eco-social justice becomes a major challenge for the profession of social work.

Pawar (2010) explains that there are three generations of human rights respectively—first, civil and political; second, economic, social and cultural; and third, collective (rights to peace, development and a clean environment protected from destruction). He underlines that these global justice issues may be difficult for social workers practising in the Third World to attain for their clients. Attaining welfare provisions commensurate with the rights perspective or rights-based social development may not be possible in those countries due to the absence of an enabling ethos in those countries.

The emerging social work discourse also appears to be eager to advance a new paradigm within the profession that will take into consideration environmental issues and concerns. That a new paradigm, according to Mosher (2010), can be built on the growing acceptance and concern to value interdependence, partnership, cooperation, sharing of power and use of strengths, respect for nature and a belief in the unity of all things that is emerging in the society. Coates (2003a) suggested similar elements in a sustainability paradigm when he visualised a different ideological foundation that focused on interdependence and collectivity rather than on individualism; on connectedness rather than dualism and on holism rather than reductionism.

By implication such a paradigm shift in social work understanding would move practice towards a partnership model and would not retain the current expert/clinical orientation. Certainly some of the elements that Mosher and Coates are talking about are not completely new and individual practitioners have been using these elements for quite some time. However, it is the manner in which they are being articulated that makes them refreshing in the current context. Mosher (2010) gives an example of how a social worker might work with a client with a serious mental illness and support his or her use of medication, but may also assist the client's extended family in creation of a multi-faceted support system using natural helpers. This paper contends that this may be the basic step that would lead to development of the greening of the social work profession or a green agenda for the social work profession. This could not happen overnight but would happen when human beings realise it through their own journey. Gandhi, quoted in Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* (1989), said 'that earth provides enough to satisfy every man's need, but not every man's greed'. This paper contends that the schools of social work, world over, may be required to lead a concerted effort to develop an innovative, growing and dynamic curriculum that links environmental issues with core social work principles and practice agendas.

Analysis and Conclusions

The major implications for both the model of social development and social work thinking and practice, particularly in the context of possible greening of the profession, are:

1. That several social work authors in this decade addressed the need for social work to embrace reverence for earth and its human and non-human life as a basic consideration in its ethical framework. A clear implication of this for the profession is, expression of a commitment to the rejection of humanity/environment dualism in favour of a holistic viewpoint that accentuates the relationship between the two, i. e., humanity and environment and the need for humans to see themselves as part of nature.



2. That the profession endeavours to emulate the indigenous world view of respect and gratitude to nature, and their strategies that allow each generation to utilise earth's resources while simultaneously preserving them for future generations.
3. That material and spiritual worlds are seen as interdependent – a clear implication for a paradigm of development based on ideas about nature, community and spirituality.
4. That there is a near unanimous plea for acceptance of spirituality as part of social work practice. An implication of this for the profession is to assist development of human compassion, empathy, tender-heartedness and unhesitating cooperation that are still core forms of human response in all societies. This would provide opportunities for individuals, groups and communities to explore and set limitations for the type and level of materialistic goals.
5. That the concept of unity or 'wholeness' is basic and found in many spiritual persuasions around the globe. Implications are that better understanding of this phenomenon will account for better service delivery as it would allow social work analysis to include cultural, including religious and spiritual, variables of the clients we serve.
6. That interdisciplinary research will increase the professional understanding of environmental issues, an implication being that we would break free from our current 'thinking in silos' and work cooperatively.
7. That a sustainability paradigm may focus on interdependence and collectivity rather than on individualism; on connectedness rather than dualism; and on holism rather than reductionism. By implication, such a shift in the social work paradigm would move the profession's thinking practice towards a partnership model which would replace and not maintain its largely expert/clinical orientation.
8. That the hallmarks of healthy communities would display interdependence, partnership, cooperation, sharing of power, respect for nature and a belief in the unity of all things: by implication a shift to strengths-based social work practice.
9. That social work thinking and practice, being rooted in the pursuit of social justice, by implication ought to adhere to and support self-determination, sharing of power, inclusion and participation.

The more generic implications that have been revealed in this review are about sustainability – an ever-increasing imperative if the rights of future generations are to be respected – a personal and professional value that regards the rights of future generations. That imperative, seen in the context of experience of indigenous communities and their disregard for the mainstream model of development, demands our attention to studying their survival strategies that implicitly have recognition of the rights of the future generations for nature and its resources.

It appears that for a long time social work seems to have tacitly coexisted with the destruction of nature going unnoticed and with limited interventions. An argument has been put through this article that the profession of social work practice, rooted in social justice, has the capacity to reflect deeply on its current stance on nature and human interaction and develop capacity to work with sustainability, a trend that has high potential for meeting the current needs of human societies without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. By implication this stance would call for demonstration of life styles that are gentler, which convey



genuine empathy for human and non-human nature. The review carried out for this article has demonstrated that, for sustainable life styles to evolve and develop, visible demonstration of interdependence on nature, cooperation, sharing of power, use of strengths, respect for nature and a belief in the unity of all things need to be translated into both personal and professional values for everyday practice.

The review has demonstrated that social work has a great opportunity in sustainability and ensuring that generational consequences of environmental neglect and harm are constantly mitigated. The profession needs to recognise that we would only be doing the right thing by our espoused ethics. A paradigm shift toward greening of social work is not only desirable but possible. In the final analysis it can be summarised that environmental reality has been compelling us to re-evaluate our profession and its current foundations. It appears that some of the hard questions asked by Coates and Gray (2011) previously about duty, obligation and responsibility of social work can be reframed so that our posture as therapists and rehabilitation partners requires change. If our interventions are to address personal stress and loss of family side by side with climate change, life style and food consumption, community spaces and public policy issues, that paradigm shift requires a role in the planet (but right now it requires greening from within), a role that focuses on both self and social greening.

References

- Arka, S. (2010). *Intuitive intelligence programme*. London: Coppersun Books.
- Berry, T. (1988). *The dream of the Earth*. San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club.
- Berry, T. (1999). *The great work: Our way into the future*. New York: Bell Tower.
- Besthorn, F. H. (2000). Toward a deep-ecological social work: Its environmental, spiritual and political dimensions. *The Spirituality and Social Work Forum*, 7(2), 1, 6–7.
- Besthorn, F. H. (2002). Expanding spiritual diversity in social work: Perspectives on the greening of spirituality. *Currents: New Scholarship in the Human Services*, 1(1), 1–12. Retrieved from http://wcmprod2.ualgary.ca/currents/files/currents/v1n1_besthorn.pdf
- Besthorn, F. H. (2003). Radical ecologisms: Insights for educating social workers in ecological activism and social justice. *Critical Social Work: An Interdisciplinary Journal Dedicated to Social Justice*, 3(1), 66–106. Retrieved from <http://www.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/radical-ecologisms-insights-for-educating-social-workers-in-ecological-activism-and-social-justice>
- Besthorn, F. H. (2011). Deep ecology's contributions to social work: A ten-year retrospective. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21 (1–10).
- Bourne, E. J. (2008). *Global shift: How a new worldview is transforming humanity*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Bullard, R., & Wright, B. (2009). *Race, place and environmental justice after hurricane Katrina: Struggles to reclaim, rebuild and revitalise New Orleans and the gulf coast*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Canda, E. (1998). *Spirituality and social work: New directions*. New York: Haworth Press. Published simultaneously in *Social Thought*, 18(2).



- Canda, E., & Furman, L. (2010). *Spiritual diversity in social work practice: The Heart of Helping* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clark, M. (1989) *Ariadne's thread: The search for new modes of thinking*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Coates, J. (2003a). *Ecology and social work: Toward a new paradigm*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Books.
- Coates, J. (2003b). Exploring the roots of the environmental crisis: Opportunity for social transformation. *Critical Social Work*, 3(1): 44–66. Retrieved from <http://www.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork/exploring-the-roots-of-the-environmental-crisis-opportunity-for-social-transformation>
- Coates, J. (2004). From ecology to spirituality and social justice. *Currents: New Scholarship in the Human Services*, 3(1), 11 pp. Retrieved from http://wcmprod2.ualgary.ca/currents/files/currents/v3n1_coates.pdf
- Coates, J. (2005). Environmental crisis: Implications for social work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 16(1), 25–49.
- Coates, J., & Gray, M. (2011). The environment and social work: An overview and introduction. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21, 1–10.
- Cox, D., & Pawar, M. (2006). *International social work: Issues, strategies and programs*. London: Sage Publications.
- Donahue, B. (2001). *Reclaiming the commons: Community farms and forests in New England*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Earley, J. (1997). *Transforming human culture*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Elgin, D. (1998). *Voluntary simplicity: Toward a way of life that is outwardly simple, inwardly rich* (rev. ed.). New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Eisler, R. (1995). *The chalice and the blade*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- Ferreira, S. B. (2010). Eco-spiritual social work as a precondition for social development. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 4(1), 3–23.
- Global Alliance for a Deep Ecological Social Work. (2011). *Social Work and environment bibliography*. Retrieved from <http://www.ecosocialwork.org/>
- Gray, M. (2008). Viewing spirituality in social work through the lens of contemporary social theory. *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), 175–196.
- Gray, M., Coates, J., & Hetherington, T. (2007). The Indigenous voice in mainstream social work. *Families in Society*, 88(1), 55–66.
- Gray, M., Coates, J., & Hetherington, T. (2013). *Environmental social work*. Routledge, London.



- Grievies, V. (2009). *Aboriginal spirituality: Aboriginal philosophy, the basis of Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing*. Discussion Paper No. 9, Darwin, NT: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health.
- Haug, E. (2005). Critical reflection on the emerging discourse of international social work. *International Social Work*, 48(2), 126–135.
- International Federation of Social Workers. (2012). *Globalisation and the environment Background Paper*. Retrieved from <http://ifsw.org/policies/globalisation-and-the-environment/>
- Jones, P. (2010). Responding to the ecological crisis: Transformative ways for social work education. *Journal of Social Work Education*, 46(1), 67–84.
- Jones, P. (2011). Transformative learning, ecopedagogy and learning ecology: Pathways for social work education. In P. Jones, D. Miles, A. Francis, & S. P. Rajeev (Eds.), *Eco-social justice: Issues, challenges and ways forward: Voices from De Novo '11* (pp. 1–24). Karnataka, India: Books for Change.
- Korten, D. C. (2006). *The great turning: From empire to earth community*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
- Lappe, F. M. (2006). *Democracy's edge: Choosing to save our country by bringing to life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lysack, M. (2008). Global warming as a moral issue: Ethics and economics of reducing carbon emissions. *Interdisciplinary Environmental Review*, 10(1/2), 95–109.
- Lysack, M. (2011). Building capacity for environmental engagement and leadership: An ecosocial work perspective. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21, 1–10.
- Mary, N. L. (2008). *Social work in a sustainable world*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum Books Inc.
- Maslow, A., & Lowery, R. (Ed.). (1998). *Toward a psychology of being* (3rd ed.). New York: Wiley & Sons.
- McKibben, B. (2007). *Deep economy: The wealth of communities and the durable future*. New York, NY: Holt and Company.
- McKinnon, J. (2008). Exploring the nexus between social work and the environment. *Australian Social Work*, 61(3), 256–268.
- McKinnon, J. (2010). *Towards a new consciousness of 'environment' for the social work profession: Perceptions of a sample of environmentally conscious social workers in Australia*, pp. 65; 179; 182, retrieved from http://researchoutput.csu.edu.au/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=23128&local_base=GEN01-CSU01
- Molyneux, R. (2010). The practical realities of ecosocial work: A review of the literature. *Critical Social Work*, 11(2), 61–69.



- Morrisette, V., McKenzie, B., & Morrisette, L. (1993). Towards an Aboriginal model of social work practice: Culture knowledge and traditional practices. *Canadian Social Work Review*, 2, 231–48.
- Mosher, C. (2010). A wholistic paradigm for sustainability: Are social workers experts or partner? *Critical Social Work* 11(3), 102–121.
- Naess, A. (1989). *Ecology, community and lifestyle*. (D. Rothenberg, trans. & Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norton, C. L. (2009). Ecopsychology and social work: Creating an interdisciplinary framework for redefining person-in-environment. *Ecopsychology*, 1(3), 138–145.
- Norton, C. L. (2011). Social work and the environment: An ecosocial approach. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 21, 1–10.
- Park, (1996).
- Pawar, M. (2010). *Community development in Asia and the Pacific*. New York: Routledge.
- Pawar, M., & Pulla, V. (2012). Medha Patkar's environmental activism and professional social work in India: Mass legitimacy amidst myopic structures. Paper presented at the 4th ICSD-AP conference, "Envisioning New Social Development Strategies Beyond MDGs," Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 27–30 June.
- Princen, T. (2005). *The logic of sufficiency*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pulla, V. R., Jafri, S. A., & Rao, N. (Eds.) (1985). Hyderabad: The state of art of physical environment, a citizens' report-1985. Hyderabad: Centre for Environment Concerns.
- Rifkin, J. (2009). *Empathic civilization: Race to global consciousness in a world in crisis*. New York: Penguin.
- Russell, C. L. (1994). The social construction of other animals. *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 11(3), 136–40. Retrieved from <http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/318/484>
- Sacco, (1989).
- Schumacher, E. F. (1989). *Small is beautiful* (2nd ed.). Harper Perennial, Chicago
- Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2011). Needs and subjective well-being around the world. *Journal of Personal Social Psychology*, 101(2), 354–65.
- Wheatley, M. J., & Kellner-Rogers, M. (1999). *A simpler way*. San Francisco, CA: Barrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Zapf, M. K. (2005). The spiritual dimension of person and environment: Perspectives from social work and traditional knowledge. *International Social Work*, 48(5), 633–642.



International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change. www.ijicc.net
Volume 1, Issue 3, May 2014

Zapf, M. K. (2009). *Social work and the environment: Understanding people and place*. Toronto, Canada: Canadian Scholars' Press.