



**BUDDHIST IMPACT IN THE TRANSGENDER LIVES: A STUDY OF HUNTER REYNOLDS’
*BRAVE NEW PRAYERS: RASCALLY RHETORIC TO FAN THE FLAMES OF ONENESS***

Meera Mathews

PhD Research Scholar,
Department of English,
Pondicherry University
mathewsmeeera@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Buddhist Impact in the Transgender Lives: A Study of Hunter Reynolds’ Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness

The lack of recognition of the spiritual rights of the lesbian and gay lives has become central to their equality struggles in recent years. All the world religions are reluctant to accept them and recognize their right to practice religion. This paper considers what contemporary American mystic poetry has to offer by way of alternatives to this drive for oneness with, the eternal self, God. Through the analysis of Hunter Reynolds’s poems in the collection, *Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness*, alternative ways of conceptualizing the experience of non-duality in its infinite expressions of spirituality in lesbian and gay lives are considered and explored. Reynolds, deeply influenced by the Advaita and Buddhist thought gives the idea of an unconventional spirituality, which can be attained without the intervention of the ritualistic religion and finds an answer to the spiritual hunger of the gay and lesbian lives. This paper argues that Reynolds’s poetry offers new perspectives on God, religion and spirituality where God is portrayed as "delightfully deranged lover" who brings redemption to even the darkest corners of the psyche. The paper argues for the necessity of reevaluating the spiritual and religious recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

Keywords: Buddhism, Spirituality, Third gender.

ARTICLE

Hunter Reynolds In his collection of poems titled *Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness* offers new perspectives on religion and spirituality. Reynolds is an American Mystic Poet who has been affected directly and deeply by the teachings and experience of non-duality in its infinite expressions. Born in Chicago and raised in an intentional community based on the teachings of 17th century mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, he has since been

deeply influenced by Advaita and Buddhist thought. At present he works as an astrological counselor, teacher, writer and dharma poet. Hunter Reynolds weaves the meditative insights of the east with the psychological insights of western astrology, creating a unique form of counseling called “Astrodharma” in which the astrological archetypes are understood as styles of awakening.

In *Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness*, a collection of bohemian prayers and poetic



ELK

Asia Pacific Journals

ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue

ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

invocations, God is a terrorist and tech support, head master and masseuse--a "delightfully deranged lover" who brings redemption to even the darkest corners of the psyche. In a world that looks more and more like a psychotropic house party, where "even the spiritual rock stars are slouching in their sofas," Reynolds calls on a God whose compassion doesn't stay in the churches and monasteries, orphanages and soup kitchens, but permeates the whole of creation, inviting an acceptance that extends into dungeons and disasters, private shames and public failings. Nothing is off limits in this little hymnal of the non-dual. Corporate greed, sex, terrorists, pollution, death - they're all seen as wily invitations to stop letting thought and emotion tell us who we are and to sense what lies behind all the darkness and drama: a story less presence in the throes of waking up to itself.

In this book he invites the readers to come out of the spiritual muteness evolved out of the confusion between the dualistic western and non – dualistic eastern beliefs. He invites the readers "to bust out of this prayer less stupor and explore how it feels to bridge the imaginary gap between ourselves and the divine with sexy modern metaphor; to enter a brave, new kind of prayer that draws inspiration from the dire beauty that surrounds us." The book is divided into two sections. In the first part titled "Brave New Deities", There are 22 poems or deities and 25 poems in the second part titled "Ungodly Godscapes" where God is a strong hold for the weak soul .Through this innocent and frank prayers he wishes for the union with the eternal or non-duality .The prayers are

brave and is confident that God will accept him (waste) make it into "the black soil of pure awareness". In "Wild-eyed Conductor" Reynolds considers his life as a "three minute pop song" in the midst of which he has lost focus by concentrating on the pleasures of the world. So his prayer is an innocent request to start the song again. Hunter Reynolds' *Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness* is the holiest, rowdiest, truest, and most intimately connected with the tricky nature of the Divine Wow.

The *Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness* exhibits the impact of Buddhism and Advaita philosophy. Reynolds gives the idea of an unconventional spirituality, which can be attained without the intervention of the ritualistic religion and finds an answer to the spiritual hunger of the transgender lives. The 13th Century Persian mystic poet Rumi writes

"Don't wish for union.

There's closeness beyond that

This moment this love comes to rest in me,

Many beings in one being.

In one wheat-grain a thousand sheaf-
stacks.

Inside the needle's eye, a turning night of
stars."

Hence, Reynolds combines the teachings of Buddhism and Advaita philosophy to form a newer idea of a God, who is approachable by all and who holds all creatures.

According to Buddhism there are four genders, not only male and female, but also bhatobyanjanaka and pandaka. The word bhatobyanjanaka was originally translated into hermaphrodite. The term



ELK

Asia Pacific Journals

ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue

ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

"pandaka" is an even more confusing one. According to Peter A. Jackson, it probably originally denoted a male reproductive deficiency or incapacity, e.g. Eunuchs. Hence it has a broadly neutral view on homosexuality, seeing it as resulting from bad karma. Karma leads to re-birth and leaves man in eternal shackles of life on earth accompanied by pain and suffering. The Four Noble Truths comprises the essence of Buddha's teachings, though they leave much left unexplained. They are the truth of suffering, the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering, and the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering. Buddhism believes that all doings of the individual have an influence on his Karma. The Karma can be described as a form of a "spiritual bank account with entries representing one's credits and debits." which is the consequences of an individual's actions. The aim of every Buddhist is, to gain enough Karmic credit, so he or she would reach the Nirvana and be enlightened as Buddhism believes in the system of reincarnation which believes that each individual is reborn many times (up to several hundred times), until he reaches the final state, the Nirvana. A person is reborn as a transgender because they "performed actions that violate sexual morals in their previous life". The Buddhists believe that a person becoming lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender is "predetermined from birth and is the direct result of karmic debt accumulated through misdeeds committed in a former life, thus, being born a transgender is inevitable and is not a person's "fault", at least in the life

into which they are presently born". Therefore according to Reynolds suffering is a path to reach the nirvana.

According to Advaita philosophy, Advaita (not-two in Sanskrit) refers to the identity of the true Self, Atman, which is pure consciousness and the highest Reality, Brahman, which is also pure consciousness. Atman and Brahman can unite through Vidya/learning. Vidya can be attained with the help of a good teacher/guru and suffering is the best teacher. So, the state of oneness is possible for the transgender self too. Reynolds sees God as a "delightfully deranged lover", who brings redemption to even the darkest corners of the psyche. The 14th Century Persian mystic poet, Hafiz considers God as "Someone we can meet, enter and eternally explore." There is great individuality, choice and freedom both in how he leads his life and in how he expresses himself. Hence the physical state has nothing to do with the spiritual life. Gender is also an ideological construct like nativity, religion, colour, race, etc. Whatever be the gender it should not obstruct ones spiritual needs as oneness with the eternal is possible for any self. Even if religion is an obstruction one can satisfy his spiritual hunger by the non-ritualistic and meditative ways of searching for the Nirvana.

Works Cited

Archer, Petrine. "Playing With People's Boundaries: An Interview With Hunter Reynolds". *Art 21 Blog*. PetrineArcher.com. 18 June 2012.



ELK

Asia Pacific Journals

ELK Asia Pacific Journals – Special Issue

ISBN: 978-81-930411-2-3

Densen, Roger. "Hunter Reynolds: Art as Survival in the Age of AIDS," *The Huffington Post*, May 1, 2011. Print.

Edelglass, William, and Jay. L. Garfield. *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009. Print.

Haggerty, George E, and Molly McGarry. *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Studies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007. Print.

Indich, William M. *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*. New Delhi: M B Publishers Pvt, Ltd, 1995. Print.

Reynolds, Hunter. *Brave New Prayers: Rascally Rhetoric to Fan the Flames of Oneness*. New York: Flaming seed press, 2010. Print.

Williams, J.E, and D.L Best. *Measuring Sex Stereotypes: A Multi-Nation Study*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. 1990. Print.