



Living with Other Faiths

Indian Challenges and Musings

Edited by Saji Varghese



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Religious Beliefs and Rituals of the Mao Naga Religion

Daniel Mao

The indigenous people of the Maos live in the northern part of Manipur, in the mountainous regions of North-East India. The Maos have their own unique qualities, they are simple, polite and hospitable people. Today the Maos went to live in different parts of the country. The Mao Nagas are a closely knit tribal community, living close to their land and close to one another, there was nothing regarding what was good or bad written or documented within the Mao tribe. They imbued the spirit of good life according to their own "worldview". A worldview is the sum total of the elements of a conceptual system with which people deal with every aspect of their personal, social and religious life whether the culture of the community is conscious of it or not.

The Maos were proud practitioners of their own indigenous religion. They come together to live in a community, pledge themselves to each other, adhere to certain code of conduct, believe in certain supernatural realities and practice, certain rituals for favor of these realities - all these they do with a single aim of leading a good life and a religious life that brings happiness and fulfillment to them individually and collectively. The indigenous religion of the Maos was called in their own language "Opfoo Ope Chiina" meaning "the forefather's religion". The ancient Maos were very religious people, they were conscious of the Supreme Being whom they called "Oramai" and he created everything. They always try to live an upright, ethical and moral life which is quite a genuine spiritual life. The relationship between God and humans in the Mao tradition is not one of a personal in live relationship, but a relationship ruled by awe, wonder and fear of the cosmic force. They believed that a life lived not in accordance with the concept of good life, would be punished by God. Thus fear of God ruled every activity of the individual Mao.

And they believed that sacrificing to God and propitiating the deity was an important step to a happy life. In their religious rites, for example, they offered live chicken and let it off during religious ceremonies believing that

This is an important text offering significant thinking on the issue of religious pluralism in India today and into the future. India is a crucible for the human struggles relating to tolerance, acceptance and celebration. This is a continuum along which we all must walk. It is a journey of loving difference and finding in ourselves the generosity of spirit to embrace our sisters and brothers with open hearts, trusting that through reciprocal care we might build a world filled with a glorious diversity founded on a sense that as human beings we all inherit traditions that bring meaning and satisfaction to life. Such traditions are our birth right and in no way stand to lose in the face of other traditions. This is not a winner takes all world. Rather it is a world of rich diversity in which all can be winners. This book charts approaches to this realisation. I thoroughly recommend it!

– **Dr. Marcus Bussey**, University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia.

The book *Living With Other Faiths: Indian Challenges and Musings*, edited by Saji Varghese, opens new perspectives for the inquiry into the themes, questions and problems related to the presence of different religious faiths in the same country. Thanks to the coexistence of a plurality of religious faiths in its territory, India represents the ideal landscape for the analysis of religious pluralism. Moreover, India can offer precious teachings to all countries of the world on all questions and problems related to the coexistence of a plurality of religious confessions in the same country. The book proves therefore to be both a highly valuable investigation of the religious components of India and a source of answers to the problems connected to the co-existence of different religious groups. The papers of the book inquire into the positions of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and so on. They express proposals for the co-existence of the different confessions in the country. The different essays of the book investigate the relationships between religions and political environments, the possibility of a harmonious composition of the different religious components, and the responsibilities of the religious leaders for the establishment of peace between the different faiths. The book offers solutions for the affirmation of peace between the different religious groups. The volume, thanks to the richness of its points of view, subjects, approaches, and proposals, represents an indispensable instrument for the analysis of all the questions, problems and chances connected to the presence of religious pluralism within a country.

– **Dr. Gianluigi Segalerba**, former teacher, University of Vienna, Austria

The issues this anthology takes up are timely, pressing, and critical to the future of India and many pluralistic nations. The focus on how to live with other faiths strikes at the very essence of problems both in India and America, as well. The questions and themes of this volume will impact future projects on inter-faith dialogue and being in community together. How we fork community with other faiths than our own is now one of the leading issues facing the world on the brink of war across many faiths and traditions.

– **Prof. Anand Jayprakash Vaidya**,

Department of Philosophy, San Jose State University, USA

An anthology that reflects the intricate multi-faith tapestry of India: Varghese's *Living With Other Faiths* is destined to remain an important contribution to religious scholarship in India and the world. Few countries boast the religious diversity present in India, but India, like so many countries in both the global North and South, has become a theatre for religious conflict and



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