



# Understanding North-East Region of India

*Festschrift for Prof. Atul Sarma*

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## PREFACE

This volume is in honour of Prof. Atul Sarma, an eminent economist and a scholar *par excellence*. We cherish the memory of his selfless efforts to establish the Rajiv Gandhi University (the then Arunachal University), Rooho Hills, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh amidst serious financial constraints within a short span of three and a half years (19<sup>th</sup> August 2003 - 30<sup>th</sup> June 2006). We firmly believe that had he been given the chance to take over the newly converted central university in 2007, Rajiv Gandhi University would have grown significantly by now in terms of the development of competent human resources and cutting-edge research endeavours. However, it was due to his advancing age that we could not receive his guidance for a longer duration.

In Prof. Sarma, we have discovered true academic leadership – a man with vision, confidence and decisiveness. His openness to new ideas, due regard to the opinion of others, weighing options and gaining the acceptance in decision making process were truly remarkable. He had the courage to withstand odds, to resist pressure and to face any form of adversity. He could communicate perfectly well the decisions taken and execute plans. He had the capacity to understand people. He carved a niche for himself when it came to motivating scholars to constantly work on their projects with clear direction. He often advised faculty members to do 'aggressive research' and to make new breakthroughs. This kind of academic environment is extremely rare in many other universities around the world. The idea of the Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies to honour him in the form of a felicitation volume is brought forth so that the writings of various scholars are able to influence society at large; the researchers, upcoming generations and teaching fraternity of Rajiv Gandhi University in particular.

Prof. Sarma continuously advocated the socio-economic devel-

opment of North-East region of India and also played an important role in the overall development of the nation.

The discourse and framework for tribal development policies in India was initiated by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India. To quote a few lines:

**“Let the people develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them but rather try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture. Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.”**

Pt. Nehru's framework of 'tribal development in accordance with their own traditions and genius' seems to be the hallmark of the national policy towards the tribal people. So far, from our experiences and observations, it can be stated that the process of socio-economic transformation in North-East India has been on the lines of the principle 'development through culture', particularly in Arunachal Pradesh. The distinct culture of the tribal people is also a living and moving phenomenon, always subject to change.

Arunachal Pradesh has plenty of land area, and our attachment with land is like that of "one's attachment to one's mother". The abundant natural resources and cultural heritage revolves around these resources, particularly seen and practiced along the river valleys such as Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and various substreams of the mighty rivers. For socio-economic development, we have to exploit the resources judiciously and in tune with the aspirations of the people, without causing ecological imbalance. In order to attain this goal, the cultural study of the particular landscape is the first pre-requisite. The projects we undertake should be with mutual support of each other and particularly, the stakeholders of the area. In today's world, development must be inclusive, eco-friendly and sustainable. In order to boost the economy of the region the abundant resources at our command should not remain resources only, which neither we exploit ourselves, nor allow others to exploit.