

## *Part II*

# *The Asian Region*

Poverty research in Asia is considerable, in terms of coverage and its thematic as well as intertemporal distribution. Most of the research in the 1960s investigated the equity aspects of growth, the trickle-down thesis and its validity, the relevance of the "bootstraps" strategy, redistribution of income through fiscal and other policy instruments, absolute and relative poverty, a fixed vis-à-vis a variable or moving poverty line, using a mix of positive as well as normative concepts and instruments of poverty measurement. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, the focus of research shifted more toward an understanding of the political economy of poverty, its structure, and how it generated differential incidences of poverty and inequality. The six chapters in Part II review some of these approaches, with particular focus on poverty lines and their refinements, regional dimensions of poverty, and ethno-religious explanations with regard to the causative factors.

The chapters cover only a fraction of the vast region that Asia-Pacific represents. But, in a wider sense, they do depict the basic configuration of poverty and its intensity. Its causes and consequences, however, continue to generate heated debates, leading at times to polar positions. According to one estimate of the World Bank there were 633 million poor people in the world in 1990, more than two-thirds of whom (425 million) were in Asia, a continent that represents enormous diversity in terms of stages of development, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, and human development. Quite understandably, research on poverty in this vast and heterogeneous region has not followed any uniform pattern. An analysis of the Human Development Index country ratings by the United Nations Development Programme in 1993 shows there is no obvious link between income and human development, and secular economic growth does not automatically lead to an improvement in the quality of life. Independent analytic research carried out by individual academics or donor agencies has often arrived at similar conclusions.

All the papers call for more focused research, more refined and specific-purpose poverty data, and the need for comparative research. Given the diversity of Asia, it is somewhat reassuring from the point of view of comparative research that researchers doing independent investigations have been able to reach a certain broad consensus on the needs for higher-quality poverty research in Asia.