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.

Chapter 5
South Asia: An Overview
K. Tudor Silva and K. Athukoralu

Introduction
This chapter reviews selected research on poverty in South Asia published between 1980 and 1994. South Asia includes India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Bhutan, comprising the Indian subcontinent and the island nation of Sri Lanka. The volume of literature on poverty in this region is very extensive indeed, even when limited to a period of fourteen years. Therefore, this review only deals with selected poverty research in the region in the period covered, bearing in mind the broader project objective of comparative poverty research. In selecting material for this review the best access has been to the relevant literature on Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and India, in that order of coverage. This limitation must be borne in mind in assessing the review.

The significance of South Asia in poverty research
In 1991 South Asia had a population of 1.1 billion or roughly about 20 percent of the entire world population (SAARC 1992: 1). According to World Bank estimates for 1990, one half of the entire poor population in the world lived in South Asia (World Bank 1992). Thus, as a region, South Asia has by far the largest concentration of poor people in the world. A report published in November 1992 by the Independent South Asian Commission on Poverty Alleviation appointed by the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) estimated that 30–40 percent of the population in the region is below the poverty lines set in the respective countries (SAARC 1992: 1). South Asia is also one of the most densely populated regions of the world, with an