

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

8.1 ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Economic geography can be defined as that branch of geography which studies the spatial variations on the surface of the earth of activities related to production, exchange and consumption of goods and services. (All activities relating to production, consumption and exchange of goods are called economic activities.)

The above definition of economic geography and economic activity indicate that there are numerous types of economic activities. The broader term 'production' for example would include production of various types of commodities ranging from production of food grains to animal products, fishing, forestry goods and the most advanced industrial goods. Likewise, 'exchange' would also include exchange of various goods in different ways. Therefore, a classification of economic activities is necessary for a meaningful study of economic geography. One useful classification of various economic activities can be attempted in terms of a continuum from simple to complex, from the harvesting of natural plant products to creating them purposefully using modern agricultural practices and methods. On this basis the economic activities are divided into the categories of primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary activities.

① **Primary activities** include activities such as hunting of animals, gathering of plant products such as fruits and nuts, obtaining minerals from the earth's crust, fishing and harvesting of crops and trees. These activities are thus concerned with obtaining products from nature directly. Due to the outdoor nature of their work, the people engaged in these activities are often called red-collar workers.

② **Secondary activities** are concerned with addition of value to the already existing products by changing their form. These activities include processing and increasing the utility of the products of the primary activities. Examples of secondary activities include production of textiles by processing fibres obtained from animals or plants and production of steel goods by processing iron ore. Sometimes commercial farming is also included in this group of activities. (This is so because the farmers engaged in commercial farming make use of hybrid seeds and modern technology in cultivation and harvesting to increase yields. However, not all geographers accept commercial farming a secondary activity. Workers engaged in the activities of secondary production are often called blue-collar workers.)

③ **Tertiary activities** are concerned with providing service rather than production of tangible goods. These activities include a range of personal and business services, and they involve a rapidly growing number of workers in highly developed and

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diversified areas. These persons provide the services like those of retail clerks, barbers, secretaries, etc. They are said to be the workers who *take in each other's washing*. People engaged in these activities called pink-collar workers.

(u) Quaternary services represent a special type of service work focussing on professional and administrative services. These activities include financial and health services, information processing, teaching and government services and entertainment services. Almost all activity related to quaternary services takes place in the office building environments or specialised environments like those provided by schools, hospitals, hotels, theatres etc. People engaged in these activities are called white-collar workers.

Another type of economic activities, quinary activities, is also sometimes identified. The number of people engaged in these services remain generally small. They include the chief executives and other top management officers in the government as well as private services. Researchers, legal authorities, financial advisors and professional consultants providing planning and problem solving services belong to the workers engaged in this category of economic activities. People engaged in such activities are sometimes called gold-collar workers.

Human populations have adopted various types of economic activity as the basic support to life. These activities are aimed at procuring not only the sustenance but also the luxuries. What activity people adopt in a particular region depends largely upon the physical environment of the area they inhabit. Some areas offer the choice of a large number of occupations while others restrict this choice to a few. The people of the rainy rugged mountainous areas of southernmost parts of South America (Yaghan Indians) have little choice other than hunting and fishing. The harsh environment of the Yaghans allows them little choice in the type of work they can do and most of their time and energies are spent in trying to satisfy their primitive wants of food, shelter, fuel, tools and artifacts of personal adornment. The short cool summers, heavy rains, cloudy weather and a thin soil cover preclude devel-

opment of even agriculture beyond a subsistence level. In contrast to this simple lifestyle of the Yaghan Indians is the life of the highly urbanised metropolitan areas where millions of people pursue a wide variety of occupations. A very small proportion of the total population of the large cities is engaged in activities like farming and fishing or other primary activities. Large tracts of surrounding lands provide the basic needs of the city dwellers. Dwellers of the cities of Mumbai and Delhi get their food from practically all corners of the country. Similarly the inhabitants of many of the European cities obtain their basic requirements of food and fibres from all corners of the world.

The people inhabiting the valleys of the Ganga, the Yangtze and the Mississippi also have a wide choice of occupations. While some of them engage in crop farming, others are engaged in the primary activities of animal husbandry. Some people are engaged in activities of fishing and forestry too. In addition to the primary activities, the secondary activities (manufacturing) and tertiary activities (services) engage significant proportion of the population of these regions. The congenial climate, fertile soils and abundance of water in the river valleys make these regions suitable for the cultivation of a large variety of crops. The agricultural production of these regions can support very large populations. Thus large cities have grown in or around these regions of abundant food supply. Most people in these cities are engaged in a variety of secondary and tertiary activities.

Besides physical environment, the technology and availability of energy resources also influence the economic activities of the people. It is observed that people with a less developed technology have a more limited choice of economic activities even though the physical environment may be congenial. An example here can be taken from the Zaire basin in Africa. Though this region experiences a warm and humid climate with a long growing season, the tribal Pygmies in this region still live largely as hunters and food gatherers. The Negro farmers with somewhat better technical skills have a broader choice of occupations in the same region. Malaysia and Singapore situated in an area of similar climate