

Approaches to Study Economic Geography

**The approaches to study economic geography
can be divided into three categories:**

1. Traditional Approaches
2. Philosophic Approaches
3. Modern Approaches

1. Traditional Approaches:

These are the approaches which are common in geography and frequently used in economic geography. These are:

- (i) Regional Approach,**
- (ii) Commodity or Topical Approach, and**
- (iii) Principles Approach.**

(i) Regional Approach:

The term 'region' is very popular in geographical literature and refers to a suitable areal unit, e.g., a climatic region, a natural region, an industrial region, an agricultural region, an administrative or political region and so on. A region is having common geo-economic characteristics, a resource base, economic development and to some extent similarities in culture and demographic structure.

Therefore, several geographers have chosen this regional approach in economic geography. **An advantage of the regional approach is that it gives a better knowledge of different parts of a unit, their relationship to each other and to the unit as a whole.**

(ii) Commodity or Topical Approach:

This approach provides a systematic description and interpretation of the world distribution pattern of a commodity (wheat), or an industry (cotton textile industry), or a human occupation (fishing). It analyses the whole sequence of their development, and catches them on their march to progression or retrogression.

This topical or commodity approach is very popular. The systematic economic geography, if we choose this appellation, is the legitimate child of this very conception.

(iii) Principles Approach:

In every sphere of human activity certain fundamental truths or principles hold good: indeed, they provide the rock-foundations upon which the varied and varying superstructures rest. The concepts of Economic Geography are through and through permeated with the same spirit whether we talk of Regional Economic Geography or Systematic Economic Geography.

Economic regions are based on certain fundamental principles; and similar is the case with the extraction of minerals (coals, iron ore or diamond), or the localisation of industries (metal fabricating or textile industries), or the exchange of commodities.

At least four principles, viz., the principle of geonomics relationship, the principle of optimum location, the principle of regional specialisation and the principle of geonomic succession appear to be valid generalisations under all conditions.

2. Philosophic Approaches:

The 1990s research in economic geography may be characterised by three major philosophic approaches. These are:

- (i) Positivism,**
- (ii) Structuralism, and**
- (iii) Humanism.**

(i) Positivism:

It employs the scientific method to interpret and understand issues in economic geography. The scientific approach is based on empirically verifiable and commonly agreed upon evidence through replication of analytical results.

It involves informed hypothesis testing leading to empirical generalisations and law-like statements.

(ii) Structuralism:

In economic geography, structuralism, posits that what we see in the world does not reveal the causes of what we see. The structure of the economy cannot be directly observed, and we should therefore, develop ideas and theories that will help us understand what we see and experience. While there is no way to directly test such theories, we can debate about them to achieve better understanding.

(iii) Humanism:

It is a part of critique of positivism. Humanistic economic geographers object to both positivism and structuralism on the basis that these approaches view people as responding mechanically to spatial and structural forces.

3. Modern Approaches:

In economic geography, three approaches have been developed during last three decades that can be considered as modern approaches. These are:

- (i) System analysis,**
- (ii) Behavioural approach, and**
- (iii) Institutional approach.**

(i) System Analysis:

A system is a set of identified elements so related that together they form a complex whole. System analysis is an approach or methodology rather than a philosophy or scientific paradigm.

Economic geographers utilise the system concept in order to better understand the component elements of some part of reality, and the relations between them. The use of such a conception stresses the study of the whole as well as of the parts. Thus, the world economy can be regarded as a set of interlocking parts and sub-systems.

(ii) Behavioural Approach:

Incorporation of the behavioural science outlook in geography is known as behaviouralism. In economic geography behavioural approach now has become very common. Economic geographers study the overall results of economically-oriented behaviour as they appear in the landscape. In economic geography, the study of decision-making process is an important aspect.

The type of decision-making, which is the concern of economic geography, can be classified as problem-solving or behavioural decision-making with such results as new locations for shops, farms or factories.

Similarly, the studies of consumer behaviour, movement or trip behaviour, etc. are considered to be important. The decision-making process and other aspects of behavioural analysis.

(iii) Institutional Approach:

Ron Martin (2003) has emphasised the need of institutional approach in economic geography. He stated that the form and evolution of the economic landscape cannot be fully understood without giving due attention to the various social institutions on which economic activity depends and through which it is shaped.

In other words, economic activity is socially and institutionally situated and it cannot be explained by reference to atomistic individual motives alone, but has to be understood as enmeshed in wider structures of social, economic and political rules, procedures and conventions. It is the role of these systems, both formal and informal, which is the focus of an institutional approach to economic geography.