Chapter - 12:

In less than 300 years, the world population has increased from 1 billion to 6 billion. Around 8000 B.C., the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals led to increased food supplies and population growth, but even then, harsh living conditions and disease still put limits on the rate of growth. This pattern continued until the mid-18th century, when the Industrial Revolution improved the standard of living for much of the world’s population. The improvements included better food, cleaner drinking water, improved housing and sanitation, and advances in medical technology, such as antibiotics and vaccinations against infectious diseases—all of which contributed to rapid increases in population. Population doubling time is the time re- quired for a population to double from a given base year if the current rate of growth continues. It took several thousand years for the world’s population to double to a size of 14 million, but then took only a thousand years to nearly double to 27 million and another thousand to reach 50 million. The most populated country in the world today is China, where nearly one in five people on this planet live. By 2050, India will become the most populated country. Not only the factors mentioned above, but factors like immigration which has been a source of population of growth in the US, armed conflict, economic stagnation and high rates of diseases can also affect the population growth. To reach population stabilization, fertility rates throughout the world would need to achieve what is called “replacement level,” whereby births would replace, but not outnumber, deaths. Transformation of a society is not only the effect of population growth, but also urbanization as well. As population has increased, so has the proportion of people living in urban areas. An urban area provides every non-agricultural service and drives the economy of the country. Although countries differ in their definitions of “urban,” most countries designate places with 2,000 people or more as being urbanized. According to the U.S. census definition, an “urban population” consists of individuals living in cities or towns of 2,500 or more inhabitants. Urbanization has given way to Megacities like New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago etc. These areas encompass skilled labor and all the services to support the growth of those areas. In many countries, natural increase (the difference of births minus deaths) accounts for 60 percent or more of urban population, with the remaining 40 percent due to a combination of migration from rural to urban areas and the reclassification of areas from rural to urban. Urbanization of the US started in 1700s when more unskilled labor seeking manufacturing jobs, moved to the big cities like Philadelphia, Boston, NYC etc. Technological advancements were made in order to support better transportation and improve the agricultural sector. In the late 19th century, railroad and trolley lines enabled people to live outside the city and commute into the city to work. As more people moved to the suburbs—urban areas surrounding central cities—the United States underwent suburbanization. As city residents left the city to live in the suburbs, cities lost population and experienced de-concentration, or the redistribution of the population from cities to suburbs and surrounding areas. Urban Sprawl although led to the formation of metropolitans, it also resulted in loss of green space, endangerment of wildlife, traffic congestion and pollution. Due to this, micropolitan areas or a small city near to the big city came into existence so that people can live peacefully near to their workplaces. The structural-functionalist perspective focuses on how changes in one aspect of the social system affect other aspects of society. According to demographic transition theory of population, high fertility rates are necessary in traditional agricultural societies to offset high mortality and to ensure continued survival of the population. As a society becomes industrialized and urbanized, improved sanitation, health, and education lead to a decline in mortality. The increased survival rate of infants and children along with the declining economic value of children leads to a decline in fertility rates. Structural functionalists view the development of urban areas as functional for societal development. Power and wealth also affect the development and operations of urban areas. The capitalistic pursuit of wealth contributed to the development of cities, because capitalism requires that the production and distribution of goods and ser- vices be centrally located, thus, at least initially, leading to urbanization. Today, global capitalism and corporate multinationalism, in search of new markets, cheap labor, and raw materials, have largely spurred urbanization of the developing world. This is what Conflict Perspective focuses on. The symbolic interactionist perspective focuses on how meanings, labels, and definitions learned through interaction affect population problems. For example, many societies are characterized by pronatalism—a cultural value that promotes having children. There have been various social problems related to population growth and urbanization. Problems like Below-Replacement Fertility, environmental problems leading to resource scarcity, poverty and unemployment, sanitation in urban housing (slums, ghettos, or barrios in Latin America) have persisted since decades. This has led to global insecurity, poor health for children, mothers and families in general. Transportation modes have been severely affected. Diseases spread rapidly and wildlife gets displaced far too easily. Strategies have been made in order to respond to the problems caused by population growth and urbanization. Efforts have been made to maintain population rate in high fertility areas. The places having low fertility rates have also seen an increase in population to preserve native cultures in many parts of the world. Family Planning Services, China’s One-Child Policy and improved social status for women in both education and employment have been promoted and adopted by a lot of countries. Health Services have been improved and access to education has been made easier so that more and more people understand the challenges of being a human in an urban society. The countries are working not only to reduce, maintain or increase population rates according to their needs but at the same time working to preserve the fruits of urbanization.