Chapter – 13:

Globalization, Population Growth and Urbanization, are the three most important factors in the functioning of the modern country. However, with them, environmental problems are a given. The pollution and the degradation of environment has been caused by the permeability of the international borders and the growth of free trade. A striking example of the permeability of international borders to pollution is the spread of toxic chemicals (such as polychlorinated biphenyls [PCBs]) from the Southern Hemisphere into the Arctic. In as few as five days, chemicals from the tropics can evaporate from the soil, ride the winds thousands of miles north, condense in the cold air, and fall on the Arctic in the form of toxic snow or rain. Another environmental problem involving permeability of borders is **bio-invasion:** the intentional or accidental introduction of organisms in regions where they are not native. Bio-invasion is largely a product of the growth of global trade and tourism. The World Trade Organization (WTO) and free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) allow transnational corporations to pursue profits, expand markets, use natural resources, and exploit cheap labor in developing countries while weakening the ability of governments to protect natural resources or to implement environmental legislation. The sociological theories on environmental problems provide us with insights into how society has been affected by the environmental problems and also the causes and the responses to it. According to structural-functionalist perspective, the focus is on raising the awareness of negative consequences of social actions on environment. For example, more than 840,000 dams worldwide provide water to irrigate farmlands and supply some of the world’s electricity. Yet dam building has had unintended negative consequences for the environment, including the loss of wetlands and wildlife habitat, the emission of methane (a gas that contributes to global warming) from rotting vegetation trapped in reservoirs, and the alteration of river flows downstream, which kills plant and animal life. Dams have also displaced millions of people from their homes. The conflict perspective suggests that pursuit of wealth, power and profit have also led to environment problems. The capitalistic pursuit of profit encourages making money from industry regardless of the damage done to the environment. Symbolic Interaction perspective is based on interaction among people, what media portrays about environment problems and what effect it has. Whether an individual recycles, drives a sport-utility vehicle (SUV), or joins an environmental activist group is influenced by the meanings and definitions of these behaviors that the individual learns through interaction with others. The term **greenwashing** refers to the way in which environmentally and socially damaging companies portray their corporate image, products, and services as being “environmentally friendly” or socially responsible. Energy production for masses has caused deforestation and exploitation of environment to extract natural gas, coal and oil. Biodiversity loss, global warming, are causing unrest among people. To support more and more people, forests are being cleared so that human settlements, agricultural land and roads can be built. The land has been so severely overused that even the patches of land once known for their fertility have been deserted. Pollution is not only caused by big industries. It is also caused by common household because the rate of use of personal products, plastic bags, other non-perishable items have increased exponentially. Cars, industrial chimneys have given rise to some very toxic chemicals which are now ever present in the atmosphere causing global warming. As global warming melts ice and snow, it exposes more land and ocean area, which absorbs more heat than ice and snow, further warming the planet. The melting of Siberia’s frozen peat bog—a result of global warming— could release billions of tons of methane, a potent greenhouse gas, into the atmosphere and cause further global warming. This process, whereby the effects of global warming cause further global warming, is known as a positive feedback loop. Economic development increases and so does the environment pollution. In regions with low levels of economic development, industrial emissions are minimal, but emissions rise in countries that are in the middle economic development range as they move through the early stages of industrialization. However, at more advanced stages of industrialization, industrial emissions ease because heavy-polluting manufacturing industries decline, “cleaner” service industries increase, and because rising incomes are associated with a greater demand for environmental quality and cleaner technologies. Cleaner sources of energy have been studied and cautiously used. Nuclear Energy is one such concept which has now become a reality. But the waste management especially the radioactive waste generated by nuclear power plants is a very big concern. Waste management is also an issue that every person needs to address. For example, n 1960, each U.S. citizen generated 2.7 pounds of garbage on average every day. This figure increased to 3.7 pounds in 1980, and to 4.6 pounds in 2007. Social and cultural factors that contribute to environ- mental problems include population growth, industrialization and economic development, and cultural values and attitudes such as individualism, consumerism, and militarism. Strategies for alleviating environmental problems include efforts to lower fertility rates and slow population growth, environmental activism, environmental education, the use of “green” energy, modifications in consumer products and behavior, and government regulations and legislation. Sustainable economic development and international cooperation and assistance also play important roles in alleviating environmental problems. The problems are more, and the solutions have not been up to the mark. Countries have adopted policies to combat environment degradation but due to the interplay of globalization, it becomes more and more difficult to isolate environment from situation. People need to step up and realize how best they can improvise and make environment better for their future generations.