

**NPTEL**  
**Nation and Narration**

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**Week1**  
**Lecture 1 2**  
**Transcript from the Video**

Hello everyone,

Welcome to the first lecture of Nation and Narration. In this lecture, we are going to examine the factors responsible for the origin of the idea of nation in the West. Why do I begin my lecture by focusing on the idea of nation in the West? Well, there is a reason for that. As we all know, the idea of nation originally came into being in the West. So, for the non-western world, particularly for the Afro-Asian countries like India, the concept of nation is a derivative discourse. In other words, it is an idea that we borrowed from the West.

The idea of nation was first materialized in Europe as a result of the strong desire on the part of the populace to come out of monarchy and establish a form of government based on people's will. This means that monarchy and nation are mutually incompatible. While a nation is governed by the collective will of the people, the monarchy is based on the will of a king or a queen. In nation, the power is vested in the hands of the people, while in monarchy the power rests with the monarch. Monarchies usually function through hereditary succession. Only members of the royal family or aristocracy have political authority. But, in a nation-state, power is typically based on the principle of popular sovereignty, meaning that governance is determined by the will of the people rather than a hereditary ruler. In such systems, governance is legitimized through elections, constitutions, and the participation of citizens in decision-making.

You might be wondering why I am drawing this distinction between monarchic rule and the nation. There is a reason for it. This is to show you how monarchy embodied everything that nation states detested, like hereditary rule, aristocratic privileges, suppression of people's political participation, etc. In the European context, monarchy was the predominant system of governance, before the nation-states emerged. This meant that nation-states could come into being, only when the monarchy withered away.

Did monarchy wither away naturally, like leaves falling from a tree? No, it didn't. Certain historical forces played a crucial role in shaking the very foundation of monarchy. There were three important events responsible for the disintegration of monarchic rule in Europe, namely Enlightenment, Revolution and Print Capitalism. Let us take a look at these aspects one by one. First let us examine how Enlightenment challenged the monarchy. As you all know, the Enlightenment, which spanned the 17th and 18th centuries, was a cultural and intellectual movement in Europe. It emphasized reason, scientific temper and individual rights. One of the greatest contributions of Enlightenment to the disintegration of monarchy was in the form of its challenge to divine right theory. Now what is divine right theory? The divine right theory asserted that a monarch's legitimacy and authority are granted directly by God, and hence are beyond the purview of earthly authority, such as the will of the people or the rule of law. According to the divine right theory, challenging the authority of the monarch was tantamount to challenging the divine authority of God.

During the age of Enlightenment, the divine right of the king was challenged multiple times. Demands were made for the rule of the people. Thinkers like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Montesquieu questioned the very idea of divine authority in governance. Locke, in his famous *Two Treatises of Government* emphasized that political authority arises from the consent of the governed, not from the divine will. In "The Social Contract," Rousseau argued against the idea that monarchs were divinely empowered to rule. He asserted that only the general will of the people has the right to legislate. He proposed that sovereignty lies with the people, rather than with monarchs. He fundamentally rejected the divine right to rule. Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws* promoted the separation of powers, undermining the idea of absolute monarchy. During the English Civil War, spanning from 1642 to 1651, the idea of divine rights was further directly contested, with Oliver Cromwell and the Parliamentarians advocating the supremacy of Parliament over the monarchy. The execution of King Charles I in 1649 marked a significant challenge to the unquestionable authority of the king. It was the first time a reigning monarch was held accountable by the people.

There were many other events which indirectly encouraged the common people to come out of their belief in the divine sanction given to the King to rule his subjects. The Protestant Reformation, led by figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin, is one such instance. They indirectly challenged the centralized authority of the Catholic Church and, indirectly, the divine justification of kings ratified by the church. Luther and Calvin encouraged the idea of individual interpretation of divine will, undermining the idea of divine right upheld by the church and the monarch. The scientific revolution, with thinkers like Galileo, Newton, and Francis Bacon, in the 16th and 17th centuries, further promoted a worldview based on reason, observation, and evidence, as opposed to the divine or supernatural explanations. The development of science and the growing interest in reason gradually and indirectly undermined the theological foundation of the divine rights theory.

For example, Galileo's support for heliocentrism directly challenged the Church's authority. Galileo's idea of the universe placed the Sun at the centre, directly opposing the Church's belief that the Earth was the centre of the universe. This disagreement led to a major conflict between science and religion. Newton's laws of motion suggested a universe governed by natural laws, rather than continuous divine intervention. Bacon's scientific method emphasized inquiry and skepticism, encouraging people to question traditional sources of power. This shift towards rationalism and secular explanations gradually weakened the theological foundations of many claims by the king and the church. The rise of rationalism encouraged people to question traditional authority. It replaced religious justifications with reason and evidence. As a result, the power of kings and the Church, which relied on divine authority, slowly declined.

Having examined the enlightenment, let us take a look at the two Revolutions, especially the American revolution and the French Revolution, to see how they challenged the monarchic rules to create an atmosphere conducive for the emergence of the idea of nation. While Enlightenment thinkers laid the groundwork for the nation, the revolutions turned those ideas into concrete political change. The French and the American revolutions embodied the Enlightenment's ideals in action. The American Revolution took place between 1765 and 1783. It was both an ideological and political movement in the Thirteen Colonies in America. Initially, the colonists were not seeking complete independence. They were primarily looking for more autonomy, while remaining loyal subjects of the British Crown. However, over time, tensions grew, and their demands shifted. These tensions eventually led to the American

Revolutionary War. A conflict broke out between the colonies and the Kingdom of Great Britain. By the time it was July 1776, the colonies declared their independence, formally breaking away from British rule and establishing themselves as the United States of America. In summary, the American Revolution rejected monarchy altogether and established a government based on democracy and popular sovereignty.

Parallely another revolution was happening in France against monarchy. It was the French Revolution. The French Revolution, spanning from 1789 to 1799, was a transformative period in the history of France. Triggered by widespread discontent with absolute monarchy, economic inequality, and the privileges of the nobility and clergy, the French Revolution sought to establish principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It began with the storming of a fortress named Bastille. The fortress Bastille was used by the French monarchy to imprison individuals without trial. It represented the king's absolute power to silence dissent, suppress opposition and foster fear among the people. The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, marked the rejection of this oppression and became a powerful symbol of the fight for liberty. The revolution ultimately led to the execution of King Louis XVI, the abolition of the monarchy, and the rise of revolutionary governments, including the Reign of Terror. Finally, the revolution paved the way for modern democracy and inspired revolutionary movements worldwide, although it also ended in political instability, leading to the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte. The adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen was a crucial event in the history of French Revolution. The document asserted that all men are born free and are equal in rights, and that sovereignty belongs to the people, rather than the monarchy. It laid the foundation for modern democracy by promoting liberty, equality, and fraternity, inspiring future human rights movements worldwide. During the nineteenth century, in central and Eastern Europe, various ethnic groups also expressed their aspirations to be nations and advocated for their own independent states. It later spread to South America in the nineteenth century and eventually reached countries in Asia and Africa during the twentieth century.

Okay now, let us wind up the first lecture. Before I sign off, let us recollect all the major points we discussed. We saw the basic differences between a nation and a kingdom. One of the key factors behind the idea of a nation was the strong desire to move away from monarchy. A nation is governed by the collective will of the people, whereas monarchy is based on the will of a single ruler. In a monarchy, power is hereditary, passed down within a royal family or aristocracy, while in a nation-state, power is rooted in popular sovereignty, where governance is determined by the people. Unlike monarchies, which rely on lineage, nation-states function through elections, constitutions, and citizen participation, ensuring a system where authority is legitimized by the people's choice. We also saw that there were three important events responsible for the disintegration of monarchic rule Europe, namely Enlightenment, Revolution and Print Capitalism. Out of these three, we discussed the different ways in which the Enlightenment and Revolution challenged the absolute authority of the monarch to prepare the ground for the formation of nation states. We saw that while Enlightenment thinkers laid the groundwork, the revolutions turned those ideas into concrete political change. In the next lecture, we will discuss the contribution of print capitalism to the growth of nationalist sentiment and a conceptualization of the idea of nation.