Matsya Nyaya in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*

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Abstract

This research paper explores the framework of the ancient Indian theory of '*Matsya Nyaya*', in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*. *Matsya Nyaya* essentially describes a state of lawless anarchy inherent in nature, where the strong prey upon the weak and in turn justifies the need for a just and capable ruler. This paper analyses the descent into chaos and the emergence of primal instincts in the absence of law and order in *The Lord of the Flies* in the context of *Matsya Nyaya*. By applying this theory to the novel, the paper aims to analyze the dynamics of power, the breakdown of societal structures and the restoration of order in the novel.

Keywords: *Matsya Nyaya,* William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*

1.Introduction

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954 depicts a group of boys stranded on an uninhabited island who, in the absence of societal structures, descend into savagery. The novel thus becomes a microcosm of human civilisation that is allegorically portrayed as a frail structure due to the inherent savagery within human nature. The narrative is a mouthpiece for showcasing the dark side of nature that implicitly emphasises the necessity for abiding by ethical principles and social structures for ensuring equity and good governance. Though it advocates reason and morality as principles for ensuring order, the

novel obliquely suggests that ordering structures are bound to collapse due to the inherent attributes of human nature and the natural world.

The ancient Indian theory of *Matsya Nyaya*, describes a state of anarchy inherent in nature, where the strong prey upon the weak, and provides a befitting framework for analyzing the breakdown of order and the emergence of primal instincts in the novel. This research paper seeks to apply the theory of *Matsya Nyaya* to *Lord of the Flies* to establish the relevance of the theory in contemporary societal structure.

2.Research Questions

- Does the theory of *Matsya Nyaya* manifest in the narrative of *Lord of the Flies*?
- What themes, characters and symbols in the novel represent the principles of *Matsya Nyaya*?

3.Theoretical Framework: *Matsya Nyaya*

Matsya Nyaya is an ancient Indian theory that metaphorically describes a state of anarchy where the strong prey upon the weak. The theory was elaborately elucidated by Chanakya in the *Arthshatra*, but it cannot be singularly attributed to any one thinker alone as it had been an integral part of the traditional Indian knowledge system. The theory has been explicitly referred to at several instances in different sacred Indian texts such as the *Shatapath Brahmana*, *Manusmriti* and *Mahabharata*.

The ‘Matsya Nyaya’ perceptibly ‘the rule of fish’ spontaneously evokes the imagery of the deep sea where the more powerful devour the weak in a state of existence that can be closely justified in the sense of ‘survival of the fittest’. The theory illustrates how chaos and lawlessness become preconditions for the emergence of a just and capable ruler. The theory simultaneously reveals the anatomy of power dynamics that carries an undercurrent of injustice embedded in nature. It also resonates to being true for human nature analogically. The theory rationally justifies principles and good governance and the rise of institutions and

societal structures as a natural response to ensure equity and balance in nature. Above all, it evokes a sense of hope in the hearts of the weak and the oppressed and encourages the subjects to place their faith in a just and capable ruler.

The theory is grounded on the premise that is an implicit social contract between the ruler and the ruled wherein the ruler should protect the weak by establishing laws and enforcing justice. In return, the subjects obey and support the ruler and this set up maintains social harmony. However, the dynamics of power and authority, get disturbed in the absence of a strong and just ruler and the society eventually turns into a battleground where the strong dominate the weak.

Matsya Nyaya emphasizes the necessity of law and order to prevent chaos and ensure justice. It can also be understood as a caveat that in the absence of a just ruler and societal structures, a society descends into a chaos where “might makes right”. It serves as a warning to the subjects that neglecting *dharma* or the moral and ethical principles leads to a state of anarchy where the powerful exploit the weak. It also hints that existence sustains itself through cycles of wild brute force and evolving structures of order.

4.Analysis: *Matsya Nyaya* in *Lord of the Flies*

Lord of the Flies examines how a group of schoolboys land on an uninhabited, unnamed tropical island and eventually descend from being ‘civilized boys’ into savage beings. The absence of adult supervision thrusts them into a situation where there are no societal norms or ordering structures and leaves them in a wild space where they must fend for themselves. The question of survival in a state of lawlessness, spontaneously leads the group of children towards building a structure that would enable them to survive as a whole. As the narrative proceeds, they elect Ralph as their leader, who emphasizes the need for rules, shelter, and a signal fire to attract rescuers. The natural emergence of order in a state of chaos seems to conform to the theory of the *Matsya Nyaya*.

The boys evolve a more elaborate set up of self-governance and Ralph begins to take support of Piggy for advice and the two allegorically seem to represent 'order' and 'rationality'. The boys further appoint Jack Merridew as the leader of a 'boys' choir', which is entrusted with the charge of maintaining the signal fire and hunting for food. Jack is supposed to follow instructions given by Ralph who takes decisions for collective good. Ralph is a capable and just leader who ensures that the young and weak boys are protected by the group. The situation typically follows the idea postulated by the *Matsya Nyaya* wherein Ralph emerges as a leader who protects the group of boys by ensuring perfect order after a period of chaos.

However, the novel does not end here, and the narrative goes deeper into revealing the darker aspects of nature that amplify the ideas described in the *Matsya Nyaya*. In agreement with the theory, the narrative reveals the pattern of cycles of order and chaos. The narrative begins to reinforce that conscious attempts of the rational mind that give rise to ordering structures are subject to outbreaks of the irrational streaks that are embedded in the unconscious structure of the mind.

The efforts of the group of young boys to develop and abide by order resemble a transient bubble that would burst inevitably. As the events unfold, Piggy, who represents 'rationality' is increasingly marginalized by the boys who chose to ignore him due to his "appearance". Moreover, Jack, who represents the irrational brute power prevailing in the wild, becomes increasingly obsessed with hunting. The cause for which he was entrusted with the task of hunting in order to make food available for everyone collectively is visibly lost. Jack begins to hunt merely for the thrill of killing pigs. He is gripped by the idea of power for his 'individual-self' and the golden objective of collective good is tarnished. Jack pivots the norms of duty, ethics and expected behaviour. The team of boys whom he leads begins to take commands from him and there are more who begin to follow him. Eventually,

Jack thirsts for more power and begins to challenge Ralph's authority. Jack resorts to immoral tactics like offering bribes of meat to attract the boys into joining 'his side'. The boys in Jack's team grow violent and with the ordering code of conduct throttled, the group succumbs to a state of chaos.

An eerie atmosphere prevails on the island, where the young boys feel particularly insecure. The narrative proceeds, and the boys are inexplicably plagued by the vague sense of a harrowing "beast" moving around the island. It seems strange that they are tormented by the beast even though nobody encounters him directly in person. Yet the beast seems omnipresent and ready to emerge from nearly anywhere. The fear aggravates when a 'dead paratrooper' lands on the island and is mistaken to be the beast. It eventually becomes apparent that the boys' fear of the beast symbolizes the irrational aspect of their mind.

Eventually, Simon, an introspective young boy, realizes that the "beast" is not someone external, but is rather a force that exists within each boy. He has a hallucinatory encounter with "The Lord of the Flies", a severed pig's head whom the hunters had hung. In the encounter, Simon gathers that the true danger lies in the boys' own tendency for evil. However, when he goes to share his revelation with the others, he is mistaken for being the beast and is brutally killed by the frenzied boys during a ritual dance.

Simon's enlightenment and death reveal how Truth goes unheard amid an overpowering reign of chaos. Jack enjoys a huge group of followers and they part ways to establish their 'own tribe' by an act of painting their faces to mark themselves distinctly. The group of boys descend into savagery, violence and utter chaos. The boys begin to engage in violence towards each other and their conch shell, once a symbol of order, loses its significance. Likewise, Piggy's glasses, crucial for starting the signal fire are also lost.

The narrative peaks towards a climax when Ralph, Piggy, and the remaining 'loyal boys' confront Jack's tribe. In the ensuing violence, Roger, one of Jack's followers,

deliberately rolls a boulder that kills Piggy and shatters the conch shell. Ralph is forced to flee for his life as Jack's tribe hunts him down with the intention of killing him. Just as Ralph is about to be captured and killed, the boys are discovered by a naval officer who has arrived on the island. The officer is shocked at how the innocent, young children have turned into savages. The entry of the officers makes the boys realize how they have changed and they witness an ambivalence of emotions. The prospect of going home and the memory of order juxtapose with their wild actions. They begin to sob, and the officer turns away, allowing them a moment of reflection and guilt.

The entry of the officer symbolically connotes the presence of a capable ruler whose presence ensures rationality, order, justice and protection. The novel typically presents cycles of order and chaos that portray how the weak are crushed and throttled by those who are more powerful in a natural environment. The narrative emphasises the need for a capable ruler for ensuring the welfare and protection of the weak by the characters of Ralph and the naval officer.

A. Representative Themes

Anarchy and Civilization: The central theme of *Lord of the Flies* is the tension between civilization and savagery. The descent of the boys into anarchy reflects the principles of *Matsya Nyaya*, where the lack of societal structures leads to chaos and predatory behaviour.

Power and Control: The struggle for power between the characters Ralph and Jack symbolizes the dynamics of *Matsya Nyaya*. After their aircraft crashes on a marooned island, the group of boys appoints Ralph as their leader through a mutual consensus. They appoint Jack and his team for hunting to take care of their security and to ensure a supply of food through hunting. However, Jack begins to crave power and decides to replace Ralph by means of violence. Jack's rise to power through fear and violence illustrates the triumph of might over right in a lawless environment.

B. Representative Characters

Ralph: Ralph represents order, democracy, and the attempt to establish a civilized society. His leadership is challenged by the primal instincts and aggressive tactics of Jack, reflecting the dynamics of power described by *Matsya Nyaya*.

Jack: Jack embodies the primal instincts and the desire for power. His transformation from a choirboy to a ruthless leader highlights the predatory behavior that emerges in the absence of societal order, aligning with the theory of *Matsya Nyaya*.

Piggy: Piggy symbolizes intellect, rationality, and the voice of reason. His vulnerability and eventual demise illustrate the exploitation of the weak by the powerful, as described by *Matsya Nyaya*.

C. Representative Symbols

The Conch Shell: The conch shell symbolizes order, authority, and democratic governance. Its destruction signifies the complete breakdown of societal structures, echoing the state of *Matsya Nyaya*.

The Beast: The fear of the "beast" represents the primal instincts and inherent savagery within the boys. This fear is manipulated by Jack to control and dominate the group, illustrating how the absence of law and order allows for the exploitation of the weak by the powerful.

Piggy's Glasses: Piggy's glasses symbolize intellect, rationality, and the power of insight. Their destruction signifies the triumph of brute force over intellect and reason, aligning with *Matsya Nyaya*.

Conclusion

The theory of *Matsya Nyaya* provides a valuable framework for understanding the themes, characters, plot, and symbols in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The novel's depiction of the breakdown of societal structures and the emergence of primal instincts

reflects the principles of *Matsya Nyaya*, where the strong prey upon the weak in a lawless environment. By applying this theory to the novel, we gain deeper insights into the dynamics of power, the fragility of civilization, and the inherent savagery within human nature.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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