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A NOTE ON RINGS WHICH ARE MULTIPLICATIVELY GENERATED BY IDEMPOTENTS AND NILPOTENTS

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ABSTRACT. We give the structure of certain rings which are multiplicatively generated by nilpotents or multiplicatively generated by idempotents and nilpotents.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

In a Boolean ring, every element is trivially a product of idempotents. On the other hand, in a nil ring, every element is trivially a product of nilpotents. This motivates the study of the structure of a ring, which as a semi-group, is generated by its idempotents, or is generated by its nilpotents, or more generally, is generated by its idempotents and nilpotents. Indeed, we prove that a ring which is multiplicatively generated by its nilpotents is nil if it is Artinian or if it satisfies the polynomial identity $x^m = x^{m+1} f(x)$ ($f(x)$ is a polynomial with integer coefficients). We also prove that if R is a ring which is multiplicatively generated by its idempotents and nilpotents such that the set N of nilpotent elements is commutative, then N forms an ideal of R and R/N is Boolean. We also give examples to show that our conditions are essential for the validity of our theorems.

We start with the following definitions, the first of which was introduced in [1].

DEFINITIONS. A ring R is called an I-ring if as a semigroup R is generated by its idempotents. A ring R is called an N-ring if as a semi-group R is generated by its nilpotents. R is said to be an NI-ring if as a semigroup R is generated by its idempotents and nilpotents.

The following two theorems were proved in [1].

THEOREM A. *Let R be an I-ring with identity. Then R is Boolean.*

THEOREM B. *Let R be a finite I-ring. Then R is Boolean.*

REMARKS.

1. A homomorphic image of an I-ring, N-ring, or an NI-ring is an I-ring, N-ring, or an NI-ring.
2. If R is an N-ring with identity, then $R = \{0\}$.
3. Trivially, every I-ring and every N-ring is an NI-ring.

4. An I-ring need not be Boolean as shown in [1]. An N-ring need not be nil (see Example 1 below). An NI-ring need not be neither Boolean nor nil (see Example 2 below).

2. MAIN RESULTS.

In preparation for the proofs of our theorems, we start with the following lemmas. Lemma 1 is known but we give its proof for completeness.

LEMMA 1. *Let* R *be a ring such that for some positive integer* m, *and some polynomial* $f(x)$ *with integer coefficients*, $x^m = x^{m+1} f(x)$ *for all* x *in* R. *Then* $= x^m(f(x))^m$ *is an idempotent of* R *for all* x *in* R.

PROOF. $x^m = x^{m+1} f(x) = x^m xf(x) = x^{m+2} f(x))$. Continuing we get $x^m = x^{2m} (f(x))^m$ which implies that $e = x^m(f(x))^m$ is an idempotent.

LEMMA 2. *If a ring* R *satisifes the polynomial identity* $x^m = x^{m+1}f(x)$, *then the Jacobson radical* J *of* R *is nil*.

PROOF. Let $x \in J$. By Lemma 1, $x^m(f(x))^m$ is an idempotent element in J. So $x^m(f(x))^m = 0$ and since $x^m = x^{2m}(f(x))^m$ (Lemma 1), we obtain $x^m = 0$ for every x in J. So H is nil.

In [1], it is proved that a finite I-ring is Boolean. In the following two theorems we study the analogous case for N-rings. Indeed, we prove that an N-ring R is nil of R is Artinian or if R satisfies the polynomial identity $x^m = x^{m+1}f(x)$.

THEOREM 1. *Let* R *be an Artinian N-ring. Then* R *is nilpotent*.

PROOF. Let J be the Jacobson radical of R. Suppose $J \neq R$, then R/J (being semisimple Artinian) has an identity. So R/J is an N-ring with identity (Remark 1). Thus $R/J = \{0\}$, by Remark 2. This contradicts our assumption that $J \neq R$. So $R = J$, and hence R is nilpotent, since J is nilpotent in an Artinian ring.

THEOREM 2. *Let* R *be an N-ring satisfying the polynomial identity* $x^m = x^{m+1}f(x)$ (m *is a positive and* $f(x)$ *is a polynomial with integer coefficients*). *Then* R *is nil*.

PROOF. By Lemma 2, the Jacobson radical J of R is nil. R/J being semisimple is semiprime, and hence R/J is a subdirect product of prime rings R_α. Each non-zero prime ring R_α satisfies the identity $x^m = x^{m+1}f(x)$, and hence by Theorem 1.4.2 of [2], R_α has a nontrivial center. Let $c_\alpha \neq 0$ be a central element of R_α. By Lemma 1, $e_\alpha = c_\alpha^m(f(c_\alpha))^m$ is an idempotent of R_α, and hence e_α is a central idempotent of R_α. $e_\alpha \neq 0$, otherwise $c_\alpha^m = c_\alpha^{2m}(f(c_\alpha))^m = 0$ which contradicts the fact that c_α is a nonzero central element of a prime ring and cannot be a zero divisor by Lemma 2.1.3 of [3]. But $e_\alpha R_\alpha(e_\alpha x_\alpha - x_\alpha) = 0$ for all $x_\alpha \in R_\alpha$. So $e_\alpha x_\alpha - x_\alpha = 0$ for all x_α in R_α, and hence R_α has an identity element. So R_α is an N-ring (Remark 1) with identity. So $R_\alpha = 0$ (Remark 2). This implies that $R/J = \{0\}$, and $R = J$ is nil.

We now give an example to show that Theorem 1 need not be true if R is not Artinian and Theorem 2 need not be true if R does not satisfy the identity $x^m = x^{m+1}f(x)$. The ring used in the following example was used in [1] to show that an I-ring need not be Boolean.

EXAMPLE 1. Let D be any ring with identity, and let R be the ring of all $\infty\times\infty$ matrices over D in which at most a finite number of entries are nonzero. Let x be any element of R. Then, for some positive integer n and some $n\times n$ matrix

A over D we have

$$X = \begin{bmatrix} A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix} \; ; \; A \text{ is } n\times n, \; 0\text{'s are zero matrices.}$$

Let $S = \begin{bmatrix} 0_n & I_n & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$; $T = \begin{bmatrix} 0_n & 0 \\ A & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$; 0's are zero matrices.

It is easy to verify that S and T are nilpotent elements, and $X = ST$. Thus R is an N-ring which is not nil since $\begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$ is not nilpotent. This example shows that we cannot drop the hypothesis that R is Artinian in Theorem 1 or the hypothesis that R satisfies the identity $x^m - x^{m+1}f(x)$ in Theorem 2.

Next we study the structure of certain NI-rings. The following example shows that an NI-ring need not be neither Boolean nor nil.

Example 2. Let $R = \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 \\ 1 & 0 \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} 0 & 1 \\ 0 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}$

over GF(2). Trivially, R is a finite NI-ring which is neither Boolean nor nil.

In example 2 above, the NI-ring R has the property that the set N of nilpotent elements forms an ideal of R and R/N is Boolean. This motivates the study in the next theorem. Indeed, we prove that an NI-ring will have this property if the nilpotent elements of R commute.

THEOREM 3. <u>Let R be an NI-ring such that the set N of nilpotent elements of R is commutative. Then N is an ideal of R and R/N is Boolean.</u>

PROOF. If R has no nonzero idempotents, then R is multiplicatively generated by nilpotents only. So $R = N$ is nil since N is commutative, and the theorem follows. So we may assume that R has nonzero idempotents. Let e be any nonzero idempotent of R and let x be any element of R. Clearly, $(ex - exe) \in N$ and $(xe - exe) \in N$. Now, since N is commutative

$$e(ex - exe)(xe - exe) = e(xe - exe)(ex - exe) = 0.$$

This implies that $ex^2 - exexe = 0$, and hence

(1) $(exe)^2 = ex^2e$.

Using induction, (1) implies that

(2) $(exe)^{2^n} = ex^{2^n}e$ for all positive integers n.

Let $a \in N$. Then using (2) we obtain

(3) $eae \in N$ for every $a \in N$.

Since N is commutative, N is a subring of R. So using (3) and the fact that $ea - eae \in N$ and $ae - eae \in N$ we get

(4) $ea \in N$, $ae \in N$ for every $a \in N$ and every idempotent e.

Now since R is multiplicatively generated by idempotents and nilpotnets and since N is commutative, (4) implies that

(5) N is an ideal of R.

Let $\bar{x} = x + N$ be any nonzero element of R/N. Since R is an NI-ring, (5) implies that either $x \in N$ or $x = e_1 e_2 \ldots e_n$ for some idempotent elements $e_1, e_2, \ldots, e_n$. So

$$\bar{x} = e_1 e_2 \ldots e_n + N = (e_1 + N)(e_2 + N)\ldots(e_n + N),$$

and hence

(6) R/N is an I-ring.

If $\bar{e}$ is any idempotent element of R/N, then $(\bar{e}\bar{x} - \bar{e}\bar{x}\bar{e})$ and $(\bar{x}\bar{e} - \bar{e}\bar{x}\bar{e})$ are nilpotent elements of R/N. But R/N has no nonzero nilpotent elements. Thus $\bar{e}\bar{x} = \bar{e}\bar{x}\bar{e} = \bar{x}\bar{e}$ for all x in R/N and hence

(7) The idempotents of R/N are central.

Now, by (6) and (7), R/N is I-ring with central idempotent elements, and hence R/N is Boolean. This completes the proof of Theorem 3.

We now give an example to show that Theorem 3 need not be true if the nilpotents of R do not commute.

EXAMPLE 3. Let R be the ring of Example 1. Then R, being an N-ring, is an NI-ring. Clearly, the set N of nilpotent elements of R is not an ideal of R. This example shows that we cannot drop the hypothesis that the nilpotent commute in Theorem 3.

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