
UNIT 11 RISE OF MILITARISM

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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to know about the:

- rise of militarism in Japan after 1930,
- role of education and patriotic societies in creating an atmosphere for the military to increase its strength,
- means and methods used by the military to conduct the affairs of the State, and
- conflicts within the military itself.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

The period between 1931 and 1941, the decade immediately preceding the outbreak of the Pacific war, is often referred to by the Japanese as “Kurai Janima” (Dark Valley). This was a period which saw the unprecedented rise of “Militarism” and “Ultra-nationalism” in Japan.

It was during this period that the military established its supremacy in the spheres of politics, economy and foreign relations. This Unit starts with a discussion on the nature of the regime that existed during this period. It also takes into account the factors behind the rise of militarism and the role played by the patriotic societies and literature in this regard. The Unit discusses the conditions under militarism and the divisions within the military. Lastly it deals with the wartime economic policies and the attitude of military towards the War.

11.2 THE NATURE OF THE REGIME

There has been a considerable debate among scholars about the nature of the regime in power during this period (1930s and 1940s) in Japan. This debate centres around the question whether the regime was Fascist or Militarist. Let us briefly mention the characteristics of both these systems:

- i) The main characteristics of Fascism are:
 - aggressive nationalism based on the innate superiority of a stock of people,
 - a highly regimented authoritarian political state, and
 - this state is symbolized by a single leader.
- ii) By Militarism we mean a state where:
 - the military plays a pre-dominant role in the administration of the country,
 - military is the chief formulator of the economic and political policies, and
 - under military dominance an aggressive and expansionist policy is pursued in foreign relations.

The best example of Fascist states are Italy and Germany during the period 1922-45 – Italy under the leadership of Benito Mussolini and Germany under Adolf Hitler. Certain scholars equate Japan with these two Fascist state. There is no doubt that some of the Fascist characteristics were present in Japan like:

- aggressiveness in foreign relations,
- a feeling of superiority above other Asians, and
- a repressive policy in relation to dissent at home.

However, Japan's case was different from that of these two European states. There was no coup d'état in Japan, as in Rome in 1922, or as carried out by Hitler in 1933. In Japan there was no mass Fascist party as the Nazi party in Germany. Also there was no one leader who dominated the scene like Hitler or Mussolini. Here it was the military which was all pervasive and had decisive powers. Though the Emperor continued to be the head of the state, after 1930 the real assertive power was that of the military and yet it fought for the restoration of the Emperor's prestige. Hence in relation to Japan it would be more appropriate to say that the state was governed by militarism. It is also worth mentioning here that a large section of the society, let it be among the bureaucracy, the agrarian class, militarists, Asian liberationists, "national socialists", elder statesmen, and scholars, all believed in the "uniqueness" of Japan. The nationalist sentiments were inculcated into the very consciousness of the Japanese people. Even though Japan had adopted the path of modernization along Western lines it had retained certain fundamental aspects of its society such as the monarchy, Confucian ethics and the samurai tradition of service.

The nationalist feelings of the people acquired an extreme form in the 1930s, i.e. "ultra-nationalism". During the 1930s and early forties the military leaders took upon themselves the task of rescuing Japan from the influence of political and

business leaders and to restore the Emperor's prestige. The military leaders felt that the political leaders and business leaders were jeopardizing the "Japanism" of the society.

11.3 MILITARY AND GOVERNMENT

The military from the very start of the Meiji period was at the helm of the state affairs and administration. Military leaders played an important role in the decision-making process of the government. In fact almost half of the total numbers of prime ministers from 1885 to 1945 had been military leaders. In addition many military leaders often held the position of home and foreign minister as well. The ministry in any case was always held by top military leaders even in a cabinet formed by the majority political party.

The Meiji constitution promulgated in 1889 provided for a parliamentary system in which the elected representatives in the Diet participated in the decision-making. Yet they did not play a dominant role because the Emperor was invested with extensive powers. All the executive organs which acted for the Emperor could implement their plans without the approval of the Diet which also had no control over the military. For example, Article XI stated: The Emperor is the supreme-commander of the army and navy, and according to Article XII: "The Emperor determines the organization and peace standing of the army and navy".

Thus, the Emperor as the Supreme Commander was advised by the army and navy general staffs. Hence, the general staffs could formulate and execute plans which need not be approved by the Government. Nor was it necessary for them to even inform the Government about their decisions. This was because Article VIII stated: "in matters involving military secrecy and command reported by the chief of the general staff to the throne, except those matters on which the Emperor himself informs the cabinet, the army and navy minister should report to the Prime Minister."

Only a military officer could hold the Defence portfolios. Consequently, the military could topple any government which was not acceptable to it by simply asking its officer to resign or refusing to nominate an officer for the post. As we shall see later the military frequently used this tactic to its own advantage.

11.4 MILITARY DISPLEASURE WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

The genro or the elder statesmen had played a major role in the Meiji Restoration and in the modernization process of the country. They enjoyed a special status in the society which was superior both to the government and the military. The genro had direct access to the Emperor and it were their views which were often followed. As long as the elder statesmen lived there were few serious conflicts between the civilian and military policies. By 1922, however, most of the genro members had either died or retired. Now the conflicts between the political parties, which had become an important force in politics, and the military became more serious.

The military was displeased with the performance of the political parties which had formed the government since the end of the First World War. The military

objected to the attitude of the political parties who resisted increase in the military's budget and expansion of its divisions. For example, Prime Minister Kato Takaaki's government had reduced the size of Japanese army from 21 to 17 divisions. The military was also unhappy with the China policy of the political parties. The 4th February 1922, bilateral agreement between Japan and China restored the sovereignty of Shantung province to China and Japanese economic privileges in the region were ratified. Since then the China policy was aimed to mainly achieve economic goals instead of military expansion. This was termed as "soft" China policy and is associated with Baron Shidehara Kijuro (1872-1951) who served as Prime Minister from June 1924 to April 1927 and July 1929 to December 1931.

The military was critical of the "soft" China policy since Japan's gains on the mainland were likely to be imperiled due to the upsurge of anti-imperialist movement which was gaining momentum under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kaishek), the leader of the Guomindang. He demanded a review of all foreign rights including those of Japan and questioned the continuation of Japan's dominant role in South Manchuria.

The political parties were also criticized for their close alliance with the Business houses (zaibatsu). The farmers, in particular, believed that the political party dominated government safeguarded the interest of the Zaibatsu and emphasized on trade and industry rather than agriculture. For example, the import of cheap rice from Korea and Taiwan benefited the traders but had an adverse impact on the income of the farmers. The political parties, along with the business houses were charged for the spread of corruption. The inflow of foreign ideologies, which were regarded as dangerous and detrimental to the Emperor's authority was also attributed to the political parties. The Military took advantage of all such feelings against the political parties.

Against this background the Navy strongly opposed the London Naval Treaty (1930) which called for armament reduction. But the then Prime Minister Hamaguchi Yuko got it ratified by the Diet. The government came under severe criticism and there was violent opposition in Tokyo. A little later Hamaguchi was assassinated. The last Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi was also not popular with the military who did not find it necessary to keep the government informed about their military actions in Manchuria. Inukai opposed military expansion and called for discipline in the army. He was also killed by a junior military officer in May 1932. This brought to the end an era of party governments in Japan.

However, we must mention here that militarism gained currency in Japan because of ultra-nationalist feelings that had been generated for a long time. In the development of these feelings certain factors had played a role and we will discuss them in the subsequent sections.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) List the characteristics of Fascism and Militarism. Among these where do you place Japan in the 1930s and 1940s.

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11.5 EDUCATION AND NATIONALISM

Japan had successfully used education as an effective tool to inculcate nationalism in the minds of the people. The educational system, founded during the Meiji period, was inspired by the German system. Japanese, like the Germans, believed that “battles can be won in the classrooms”

The primary schools were considered to be the most fertile ground for sowing the seeds of nationalism. Moru Arinovi, who contributed enormously to the shaping of the Japanese education policy in early Meiji period, once said:

“In the administration of all schools, it must be borne in mind (that) what is to be done is not for the sake of the pupils but for the sake of the country.”

On another occasion he said:

“Our country must move from the third position to the second to the first and then to the leading position along all the countries of the world.”

As a result of such feelings moral studies were given top priority in the school curriculum.

The curriculum of the normal school opened for the training of teachers was also so planned that it would prepare them to be an ideal example to the students in obedience, devotion, love for the country, loyalty and reverence for the Emperor. A retired military officer was also employed to instill in them discipline of both mind and body.

The twin aims of education during the Meiji period were to promote “loyalty and patriotism and to create a new class of engineers, managers, financiers, etc.”

Education was also used as an instrument to further intensify the nationalist sentiments of the people. After the second war with China in 1937, the entire country was placed on a war footing. Consequently, changes in the educational system were suggested by the Education Council to suit the needs of a country at war. The primary schools were renamed “national schools”. The purpose was to train people “in conformity with the moral principles of the Japanese Empire which meant being loyal subjects of the Emperor.

The nationalist content of education was stepped up as Japan was drawn deeper into the War. The educational reform of 1941 and the policy of instruction issued by the Ministry of Education in 1943 emphasized upon the need of training the youth in “consonance with the way of the empire”, the importance of faithfulness,

loyalty, guarding and maintaining the prosperity of the Imperial throne; reverence to the deities and ancestors. It also stressed the necessity of apprising the students of Japan's mission in East Asia and the world. Studies of Japanese literature, understanding the traditions of the empire and the Japanese way of life and culture were to be encouraged.

In order to enable the Japanese to understand and appreciate the significance of the policy of greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere and Japan's mission, it was necessary to educate them about the East Asian countries and about their plight under the rule of the European countries. Thus, the government could quite easily mould public opinion in the manner in which it wanted since the nationalist fervour was very well cultivated by education. In imparting all such views the military had played a definite role. This also created such an atmosphere of nationalist feelings that helped the military in furthering its own ends.

11.6 FREEDOM OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION CURBED

Fostering the spirit of nationalism was also necessary to suppress discontent created by the changes in the political and economic structures of the country.

Industrialization brought with it population which disturbed the family system in Japan. New Western values also crept into Japanese society, which tended to erode the social system based on Confucian principles.

Several internal security laws and publishing regulations were implemented by the Meiji Government to curb the freedom of thought and expression. These laws only allowed the publication of such literature which favoured the Government.

During 1870s and 1880s there was widespread Peoples' Rights Movement in Japan. In addition to methods like imprisonment, buying off leaders and harassment, the Government enacted regulations which prohibited assembly of people (1880) and prevented the newspapers from publishing anything without the prior approval of the Government authority (1883) to crush the movements. Even plays and movies before opening to the public had to seek the approval of the government.

Nevertheless, the Peoples' Rights Movement was successful to the extent that in 1889 a parliamentary form of government was established in Japan. The constitution, however, guaranteed only limited freedom to the people "within the limits of law", which was further limited by successive laws adopted over the years.

11.6.1 Opposition to Military

There was at home a strong opposition to growing militarism during and after World War-I. The most organized and systematic anti-war movement was led by the socialists and communists. Several anti-war writings showed the military in a bad light. For example, Kobayashi Takiji's, *Cannary Boat*, 1929 (Kani kosen) described how the troops crushed a strike. The miseries and sufferings of the soldiers during the Siberian expedition were depicted in *City Under Arms* (Buso

Seru Shigai) by Kuroshima Denji. Literary works of this kind were banned. The Communist Party too, which was most vocal against the expansionist policies of the military was banned. Many of its leaders were imprisoned and others went underground.

The military used the nationalist sentiment to create such a working class that was hardworking, disciplined and undemanding. This was beneficial to both the military and the capitalists.

11.6.2 Post 1930 Regulations

As Japan's involvement in the war increased in the late 1930s and 1940s, control over freedom of thought and expression also tightened. Existing regulations were amended to widen the scope of their application. The Peace Preservation Law passed in 1925 was amended by an extraordinary Imperial Ordinance in 1928 and further amended in 1941 to allow preventive detention of political activists and indefinite detention of political prisoners.

The new restrictive legislation included the National Defence Security Law of 1941, according to which all the discussions in the Liaison Conference and Cabinet meetings were "state secrets". Anyone revealing or attempting to obtain this classified information was liable to rigorous punishment. Special laws on wartime crimes enacted in 1942 were later on revised to include interference with government administration.

Under the prevalent laws public debate and dialogue on the issues relating to war became impossible. It was also not possible for the public to know the real facts of the war since the newspapers conveyed to the public only what the government wanted it to know. It is hence not surprising if the public tended to support the Military government policies. In fact the task of the military had been facilitated by the existence and propaganda of the various patriotic societies and organizations that had existed since the beginning of the Meiji period. These societies and organizations brought out 'ultra-nationalist' literature and gave strength to the military. Many military officers were not just only members of these societies, they firmly believed in their ideology and were ever ready to carry it out. Most of these were young officers. A large number of the younger officers belonged to the ordinary middle class families; sons of small businessmen and clerks in the offices. A big number also came from the rural areas where the impact of the economic crisis was felt more. Many of these officers resented the affluence of the rich in the cities.

Inspired by the nationalist ideology, the young officers either joined leaders like Kita Ikki or formed organizations consisting of members belonging only to the army and navy. Kita Ikki, along with Okawa Shumei had formed the Yuzonsha (Society for Preservation of the National Essence). Okawa was a lecturer at the Colonization Academy and together they advocated military expansion abroad and military takeover at home. Another famous society was Sakurakai (Cherry Blossom) founded in 1930 by Lt. Colonel Hashimoto Kingoro.

The Meirinkai (Higher Ethic Society) was also composed of reserve or retired army and navy officers. The Kodokai (Imperial Way Society), founded in 1933, aimed at the abolition of the capitalist economic structure, political parties and favoured the establishment of a state controlled economy. Those societies which

were dominated by military men became popular especially after the 1931 Manchurian crisis.

The numerous plots which took place during the 1930s revealed that the High Command was unable to control their own officers. The first major proof was the Manchurian Army which controlled affairs in this region, planned and executed the operations behind the backs of the senior officers in Tokyo. The army leaders in the capital were unable to control their subsequent moves, but had to defend their actions. Junior officers broke military regulations; units posted abroad did not abide by the policies made in Tokyo. At times the military had disregarded even the wishes of the Supreme Commander, the Emperor.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) How did education contribute in the development of militarist nationalist ideas?

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? Mark (✓) or (×)
- i) Kita Ikki supported a democratic government.
 - ii) National sentiment was used to create an undemanding working class.
 - iii) Communists were opposed to militarism.
 - iv) The military, to an extent, directed the education policy of the government.
 - v) The writings which showed the military in a bad light were encouraged.

11.7 DIVISION WITHIN THE ARMY

At the highest level the army was divided as to the course of action that was to be adopted to deal with the situation created by the economic and political crisis. The two main groups were:

- i) The Kodoha (Imperial way faction) which had generals like Araki Sadao and Mazaki Jinzaburo.
- ii) The Tosei (Control faction) which included grade officers of the general staff like Nagata Tetsuzan, Tojo Hideki and Ishiwara Kanji.

The Kodo faction emphasized loyalty and morale and underplayed structural changes. The Tosei was not opposed to capitalism and a parliamentary system. Its emphasis was on the establishment and enforcement of state controls so that Japan could be prepared for war. The Tosei group received support from the businessmen, bureaucrats and some intellectuals.

The struggle for power within the military was also quite severe. The Kodo faction was in a dominant position when Araki became War Minister in 1931 and Mazaki Vice Chief of Staff. But it was the Tosei group which exercised greater influence in Manchuria.

In 1934 Araki resigned and was succeeded by Hayashi Senjuro, who gradually came under the influence of Nagata Tetsuzan. Mazaki had assumed the post of Director General of Military Education after having served as the Vice Chief of Staff. Nagata, however, managed to get him dismissed in July 1935. In retaliation Mazaki's supporters, a little later, murdered Nagata. During this period all those Kodoha members who were regarded as trouble makers were dispatched to Manchuria.

However, Kodoha members were determined to reclaim power. An attempt was made on 26th February, 1936 when young officers of this group took over the centre of Tokyo and killed top leaders like the Finance Minister, Lord of the Privy Council and Inspector General of Military Education. The young officers demanded the establishment of a new order under Mazaki. Ultimately, under pressure the officers had to surrender. About thirteen of these officers were tried and executed. Kita Ikki, though not directly involved, was also executed in 1937. Araki and Mazaki were placed on the reserve rolls. The Kodo group, as an organization, was further weakened by dispersing the officers. Some of them were transferred to far off provinces or sent to Manchuria. Between the conflicting groups it was the Tosei group which emerged victorious. But this internal struggle in the military in no way weakened the military.

11.8 MILITARY AUTHORITARIANISM

The army's authoritarianism was reflected in the manner it interfered in the formation of the cabinet. If the Prime Minister or a leader appointed as member of the cabinet was not acceptable to the military then it refused to appoint an officer to a service post. This made it impossible to form a cabinet. As the army's intervention increased the political leaders had no option but to bow before the military.

After the 26 February 1930 incident when Okada Keisuke's cabinet fell, Hirota Koki was invited to form a cabinet. He could not finalize the list of the members to be included in the cabinet till it was approved by the military.

The Hirota cabinet also was compelled to resign when the military objected to a question asked by Hamada Kunimatsu in the Diet which was interpreted as anti-military. The military asked for his expulsion or forego its cooperation.

The military also was not in favour of Ugaki Kazushige (1868-1956), who was now called upon to form the cabinet, and refused to provide a minister to the cabinet. In fact Ugaki was prevented from accepting the prime ministership in a very unscrupulous way. While Ugaki was going to Tokyo he was intercepted at the Kanagawa prefecture and Tokyo border by the Military Police Commander. The Commander got into the car and informed Ugaki that since the young officers were upset the Army Minister had asked him to convey that he should decline the offer of forming a cabinet. The reason for young officers' disapproval of Ugaki's candidature was that he had participated in the 1931 Manchurian plot.

In May 1936 regulations were revised and only active duty officers could be appointed as army and navy ministers. The prime ministers could no more appoint retired officers.

The importance of the political parties lay in the fact that they represented the masses in the lower house of the Diet and their consent to the policies meant approval of the public.

In October 1940 the parties were replaced by Imperial Rule Assistance Association (Taisei Yokusan Kai). The parties joined this association and pledged to build up public opinion favourable to the national policies. The role of the political parties in the decision-making had now reached to the lowest level.

11.9 THE WAR AND ECONOMIC POLICIES

After the outbreak of war with China in 1937 Japan's involvement in that country grew deeper. Hostilities spread in various parts of China and Japan had to incur enormous losses both in terms of men and money. The developments on the continent had an impact on the policies at home. For example, the military further geared to push forward measures which would prepare the country for a much bigger war. Similarly government control over the economy also increased further. Now there was more emphasis on the armament and heavy industries.

Soon after Konoe Fumimaro became Prime Minister in June 1937 steps were taken to bring under government control civil aviation and distribution of fuel. A cabinet Planning Board was established to coordinate the economic policies.

It was also decided that Liaison Conferences to be held between the Prime Ministers, Foreign Ministers and and Navy Ministers would take all the important decisions. Since the other cabinet ministers were not participant in these deliberations they remained ignorant about the decisions.

In 1938 an Asia Development Board was created which was entrusted with the task of conducting matters related with China. This Board in 1942 was absorbed in the greater East Asia Ministry created in the same year.

The Mobilization Law passed by the Diet in 1938 strengthened the military's authority over labour, raw materials etc. Industries which contributed to the expansion of the war machinery were encouraged. In Manchukuo too, where the military was in full control, all efforts were directed towards the development of coal, iron and steel industries and into automobile and aircraft plants.

11.10 THE WAR AND MILITARY BEHAVIOUR

As the war progressed Japan from mid 1942 to mid 1944 tried to develop and expand its empire and exploit it economically. Japan in November 1941, envisaged a plan of turning the whole of East Asia into a greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere with Japan, China and Manchukuo as its industrial bases.

Though the idea of the co-prosperity sphere was to "liberate" Asia from the control of the Western countries, Japan's main aim was to replace the Europeans in the region.

The Imperial Rule Assistance Association in March, 1941 published the “Basic Concepts of the greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere” which clearly stated: “Although we use the expression Asian Cooperation this by no means ignores the fact that Japan was created by the gods or posits an automatic racial equality.” By this was meant that some Asians were more equal than others.

On 7 December 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbour and achieved a quick victory over the United States. After this Japan rapidly established its rule in South East Asia and the Pacific.

The behaviour of the military towards the countries which Japan occupied in the course of war was far from benevolent. Atrocities committed by the Japanese soldiers in these areas have gone down in recent history as a horrifying example in brutality, loot, rape and murder.

During its long rule over Korea and Taiwan, Japan treated the people of these countries as second rate citizens. A strict assimilation policy was enforced compelling people to learn Japanese and adopt Japanese names.

As the war progressed and Japan needed a larger fighting force and labour Koreans were brought to Japan for working in factories. Special laws were promulgated which permitted them to join the Japanese military.

Other South East Asian countries like Malaya, Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, and French Indo-China resented Japanese rule more than the European rulers. This resentment emerged because of:

- the Japanese feeling of racial superiority and disregard for local customs and people,
- curtailment of political rights, and
- destruction of their economy which was changed in accordance to the requirements of Japan.

Some countries like Indonesia, Burma and French Indo-China had initially welcomed the Japanese as their “liberators”. They looked up to Japan for it was the only Asian country to defeat a European power as the memories of 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese war were still there. However, it was not long before they started hating the Japanese and the military rule imposed on them. Soon there emerged widespread and organized opposition to Japan in these countries.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mention the factions in the Japanese military. What were their approaches?

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- 2) Which of the following statements are right or wrong? mark (✓) or (×).

- i) In the early 1940s the political parties played a vital role in decision making.

- ii) Under pressure from the military funds were diverted to increase armament production.
- iii) The economic resources of Manchukuo were used to expand war industries.
- iv) The behaviour of military in countries occupied by Japan was extremely benevolent.

11.11 LET US SUM UP

The roots of the authority and the power which the military wielded after 1930 were in fact itself based in the constitution.

In reality even the Meiji leaders known to be “liberal” were quite conservative and were not prepared to extend power to the people beyond a certain limit. Hence, it is not surprising that in the democratic political system set up in 1889 the power of the representatives of the people was limited. We have seen how the military could topple cabinets and assert its authority.

The ground for the rise of Militarism had been there since the beginning. Even in pre-World War-I period Meiji leaders expounded and implemented an expansionist policy abroad. At home the media was controlled by enforcing a series of regulations and no dissent was tolerated beyond a point. However, the presence of the elder statesmen had been able to control the military.

After World War-I the political parties were given an opportunity to resolve the economic crisis and bring about political stability at home. But as far as the military was concerned the political parties were a failure. The military detested the political parties which were seen as a hindrance in the development of the armed forces.

The nationalist sentiments were used to justify a policy of expansion and military rule. Certain political associations and the education policy played a vital role in fostering such sentiments among the people.

Though there were factions within the military but the infighting in no way weakened the military’s control over politics and administration. Economic resources were diverted to create a war machine which was dismantled only after the defeat of Japan in the Second World War.

11.12 KEY WORDS

Authoritarianism: A kind of dictatorship.

Manchukuo: The Japanese after establishing their control in Manchuria renamed it as Manchukuo.

Militarism: Militarism denotes the predominant role played by the military in the administration of the country and its external affairs.

Patriotic Societies: Patriotic societies were formed to promote ideas of nationalism. Among other things they advocated policies of expansionism.

Ultra-Nationalism: Extreme patriotic feeling or policies of national independence.

11.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Base your answer on Sec. 11.2. Also compare the situation in Japan with that of Germany and Italy.
- 2) The reasons were many like opposition of political parties to increase military budget; reduction in the size of army, etc. The militarists also felt that Japan was pursuing a soft policy abroad. Consult Sec. 11.4 to write your answer.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Base your answer on Sec. 11.5.
- 2) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) ✓ (iv) ✓ (v) ×

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Mention the factions like Kodoha and Tosei and their approaches. Consult Sec. 11.7 for your answer.
- 2) (i) × (ii) ✓ (iii) ✓ (iv) ×

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