

British Imperial Censorship and Surveillance and Indian Revolutionaries' Military Information Networks in the Early 20th Century: The Case of Bomb Manuals

By MASAHIITO EJIMA

This paper examines British imperial censorship and surveillance and Indian revolutionaries' military information networks in the early 20th century, with a specific focus on bomb manuals. While earlier studies of censorship in British India have focused on seditious newspapers and literature, this study emphasizes the historical significance of scientific and military publications, which represented the practical side of the revolutionary movement. Following the Manicktollah Bomb Conspiracy in 1908, the Government of India attempted to regulate explosives and seditious publications. However, the liberalism of John Morley, the Secretary of State for India, initially limited censorship to newspapers, thereby allowing bomb manuals to continue flowing into India from abroad. In London, although Scotland Yard, the India Office, and the Government of India monitored the revolutionaries at India House, lack of cooperation prevented systematic intelligence gathering. After the assassination of Curzon Wyllie in July 1909, the Indian revolutionaries evaded the imperial "web of surveillance" by relying on networks of "coolies" (Indian migrant laborers) to smuggle weapons and bomb manuals into India. These military information networks facilitated the attempted assassination of Viceroy Minto and the Nasik Conspiracy in late 1909. While the Indian Press Act of 1910 eventually expanded censorship to include books and foreign mail, the prior dissemination of Western scientific knowledge, including military information such as that found in bomb manuals, ensured the persistence of revolutionary activities.