

***Jallad: Death Squads and State Terror in South Asia,***  
**Tasneem Khalil (London: Pluto Press, 2016).**

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Democide (murder of any person or people by their government), has often been legitimised under the slogan of, “sometimes bad things need to be done in order to keep worse things from happening.” Assassination for military and political purposes have a long history and has been argued in famous works such as Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, Chanakya’s *Arthashastra* and Machivelli’s *The Prince*. Empires and states have thrived on democide carried out by specialised ‘death squads’ often paramilitary in nature, to maintain the status quo through extrajudicial killings, executions, and other violent acts against clearly defined individuals or groups of people. In other words, state-sponsored violence is not a new phenomenon. Totalitarian states resorted to extrajudicial killings to maintain state control in history. However, state-sponsored violence escalated since the beginning of the 20th century, and haunts the beginning of the 21st with the escalating violence and terrorism, and the beginning of the fourth generation war.

Death squads are common around the world in the Middle East, South and South East Asia and Russia. Most recently, these can be equated to the targeted killings through drones by the US. Death squads, or extralegal and paramilitary units tasked with carrying out extrajudicial executions, therefore, embody the eternal boot of tyranny.

Tasneem Khalil’s *Jallad: Death Squads and State Terror in South Asia* is a captivating account of these specialised squads. Khalil, a former prisoner of conscience was incarcerated and tortured by the Bangladeshi military intelligence in 2007, after he published a story about the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in 2006. The book is an intriguing account of the specialised state death squads throughout South Asia. Khalil’s narrative is based around on-the-ground reporting, and a broad network of activists and human rights advocates including unnamed individuals,

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who offered invaluable help to the author for his research on these state agents of death to pen an undeniable portrait of the domination and repression that lies at the very core of the statecraft in South Asia.

The draconian Rowlatt Act of March 1919, granted emergency provisions to the British Raj, which included preventive detention of suspects without trial, search and arrest without warrant, juryless trials, as well as control and censorship of the press in India during the British Raj. The Rowlatt Act was used by the successor states of the Raj — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, as well as Nepal and Sri Lanka. The agents of repression became the policemen and the soldiers of the British Raj who became the instituted official go-betweens for the rule of oppression.

Even as the British used the Act to massacre hundreds and injured thousands, who opposed the colonial rule, the newly independent states of British India used both the police and the military in a series of counter-insurgency operations under various acts that were used for preventive detention of suspects that have been elaborated in detail by Khalil in his book *Jallad*. The suspects were summarily executed in police custody and military encounters. So much so that encounter killings became synonymous with extrajudicial killings in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Just as General Dyer became known as the ‘Butcher of Amritsar,’ the Indian Police Chief KPS Gill, became known as the ‘Butcher of Punjab’ for the massacre of Sikhs, and Pakistani General Tikka Khan as the ‘Butcher of Balochistan and Bengal.’ Extralegal groups operating on behalf of the state engaged in the abduction of political activists, lawyers, journalists and professors, who were picked up by men in unmarked cars and jeeps, in raids or commando operations, as well as police and army combing operations.

These operations have been dealt with in detail in the subsequent chapters dealing with the operations of these ‘death squads’ in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Connected to an international system of state-terror patronised by sponsors like the US, the United Kingdom, China and Israel, the death squads in South Asia routinely used extrajudicial execution, enforced disappearance and torture as the tools of choice. As Khalil points out in

individual chapters, the Frontier Corps (FC) in Pakistan, the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) of Bangladesh, the ‘encounter specialists’ of India, army units of Nepal, and ‘the men in white vans’ of Sri Lanka are specialists on violence deployed by the state in campaigns of state terror. Shielded by black laws and emergency acts, they are the *jallads* (executioners) who implement the domination and repression that lies at the core of statecraft in South Asia. Their targets are the political opponents of the state and socioeconomic troublemakers. According to Khalil, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are national security states, where the most important government facilities have become the temples of national security occupied by the priest of state terror. Shielded by their protectors in the developed world, the perpetrators of these abuses deploy the *jallads* strategically to silence dissent and crush opposition.

Based on personal accounts, *Jallad* is a thoroughly investigative work by Khalil that has brought the horrific acts perpetrated by the post-colonial state in the South Asian countries to light. The book is an eye opener about the specialists on violence touted as saviors, and will enable students of international politics to understand how the national security state thrives under an international system of state terror.