

PROFESSOR KENNETH A. BALLHATCHET 1922–1995

In 1993, Oxford University Press published a Festschrift for Kenneth Ballhatchet, Professor Emeritus of South Asian History in the University of London (*Society and ideology: essays in South Asian history*). Ten essays and an introduction, by just a few of his colleagues and former students, were intended to represent aspects of his contribution to scholarship; the tribute and its recipient proved sufficiently interesting to readers for a second impression to be needed the following year. It had been intended that the volume be presented to Professor Ballhatchet on the occasion of his giving the Annual Lecture of the SOAS Centre of South Asian Studies in late 1992. Sadly, illness intervened, and the book had to be presented without ceremony at a hospital in south London. As the main editor of the volume, I had deliberately avoided a valedictory tone, and not included a personal memoir or any critical appreciation of Ballhatchet's achievements. I felt I was not the person to attempt that summation, and anyway thought that the record was incomplete, because many further works would soon appear. But, though some publications are still to be expected, posthumously, Ballhatchet's death on 13 March 1995, has robbed us of this prospect. Many personal tributes have now been paid to him. As one of the two of his former students remaining in his old department, I have now undertaken to provide a brief appreciation of his scholarly contribution, while feeling no less inadequate to the task than before.

Kenneth A. Ballhatchet was born in Bristol on 29 November 1922 and educated at Clifton College, Bristol, where he won a scholarship in history which took him to Peterhouse College, Cambridge, in 1941. His studies were interrupted by service in the RAF from 1942 to 1946; two of these years were spent in India. Returning to Cambridge, he completed part 2 of the Historical Tripos with First Class Honours in June 1947. His academic career at SOAS began with his appointment as Lecturer in the History of Modern India in January 1948 and continued, with a break of two years as Reader in Indian History at Oxford (1963–65), until his retirement in September 1988. He was appointed to the Chair of the History of South Asia in October 1965 and awarded the title of Emeritus Professor on his retirement.

His contribution to his subject was notably in establishing a pattern of teaching, in building up the department, and in supervising a very large number of research students, many of whom became teachers and research-supervisors in their turn. His academic progeny are thus to be found in universities in many parts of the world. Just a year before his death when sitting round a desk with three others from three continents, in the history department office in the University of Calcutta, I realized that all of us had been Ballhatchet's students. Comparing notes, we discovered that he had applied a range of supervisory styles, so that for each of us the experience had been different. I myself was also a kind of second-generation student, in that my first teacher of Indian history, in New Zealand, had also been supervised by Ballhatchet. There are of course other scholars who had great influence on students, and some who have furthered particular approaches or ideologies in history; but there are very few whose links ran so widely and deeply, and with so little fuss or self-advertisement.

Over thirty years or so, after 1947, South Asian historiography was entirely transformed in its sources, range, and sophistication. In this development, Ballhatchet's contribution was among the most notable; current advances are

being built upon such efforts. He remained open and radical, in his historical thinking, as in other respects. He provided a bridge between historians of India, Europe and Empire, and between historians and sociologists. He was pre-eminently a social historian, interested in studies of education, historiography, Indian agrarian conditions, colonial officialdom, caste and, above all, Christian missions and imperial attitudes. Several times Ballhatchet was in the vanguard of new subjects and sources which later became the common and necessary stuff of historical scholarship. Thus his early monograph, on *Social policy and social change in western India, 1817–1830*, published in 1957 by Oxford University Press in the 'London Oriental Series', was a pioneer in a corpus of agrarian and administrative studies whose subject is really Indian society, a vein which has since been richly mined and which, though now central to modern Indian studies, is still not exhausted. This aspect of Ballhatchet's interests also encouraged a small but rich body of work in Maharashtrian social and political history. Then again, long before 'Orientalism' became a subject of passionate attack and defence, Ballhatchet helped direct critical attention to the European understanding of India (as joint editor of four volumes with that title, 1971); such studies of texts, concepts and interpretations remain important in the work of many scholars, in association with SOAS and elsewhere. As co-editor of the proceedings of the seventh European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (published in 1984) and in other editing and writing, Ballhatchet also helped indicate the change in the focus of European attention, away from studies centred upon imperial impact and towards those whose subject is South Asia in all its aspects—for example, on politics, urbanization, gender or religion. In this respect, most notably, his second monograph, on *Race, sex and class under the Raj: imperial attitudes and their critics, 1793–1905* (1980), a work as lively and provocative as its title, was a forerunner of exciting new research into social and military history, medicine, and racial attitudes.

In writing, Kenneth Ballhatchet was parsimonious of theory, but he was always keenly interested in theoretical developments and ideologies. His work was redolent of telling details and significant anecdotes—and the more readable for that—and thus always rooted in extensive archival explorations. The effect of all this on those close to him was profound, and eloquently summed up by K.N. Chaudhuri who took pains in the preface to his *Asia before Europe* (1990) to acknowledge his 'intellectual debt' to Kenneth Ballhatchet: 'During the thirty years or so that I have known him,' wrote Professor Chaudhuri, 'his support and encouragement to research have always remained strong. Ken's wide knowledge of historical sources in many different archives in many different parts of the world, his intuitive grasp of complex theoretical problems, and deep understanding of social attitudes, have been a model and a source of inspiration to all those who have been fortunate to work with him.'

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