N.S. THE HISTORIAN
N.S: THE HISTORIAN

N.Subrahmanian is professionally and by virtue of his study at the University and the diploma he holds, a historian, and a political scientist. He wrote and taught history at various collegiate levels; and initially for the benefit of his postgraduate and undergraduate students and later on for all those who were interested in the subject he wrote books on history; some of them were meant to meet the academic requirements of university examinees;¹ and some of them were intended for the benefit of students as well as of others; and a few exclusively for the use of the highly educated general reader. But to whichever category of readers he wrote, he always kept certain inflexible norms of communication in his writings and resolved never to swerve from them. Even when at times he was subjected by circumstances to submit to undesirable compulsions, he still stuck to those norms.

He was a deeply and widely read student of history who matured not only into the usual kind of ordinary teacher coaching students for public examinations but a critical student of the Philosophy of History and its allied subjects like Literature, Political Science, Economics, Archaeology, Sociology, Anthropology and Ancient Law, Constitutional and International Law and so on. His interest in literature was not confined to English but extended to Tamil (Ancient, Medieval and Modern), which he inherited and learned from his father Pandit N.Balarama Aiyar.

¹. Not only University but Public Service Commission Examinations like those leading to the Indian Administrative Services, as he did in Shillong, NEHU.
As a student of History and Logic\(^2\) in the Intermediate and at a higher level as a student of the Histories, Political Science and Economics i.e. at the Honours level, he stood apart from all (or at least most of) his college mates. He earned a reputation both as a voracious reader and a very good speaker and debater.\(^3\)

He was fortunate in his teachers, so far as most of the subjects he learnt were concerned. In the R.C.T.H.S. he had the good fortune to come under the learned influence of S.R.Balasubramania Aiyar\(^4\), Pandit Bhuvarahan Pillai, and G.Srinivasa Aiyar, the Headmaster noted for his mastery of English. At the University he had famous historians like S.K.Govindaswamy, T.Balakrishna Nair, R.Bhaskaran, R.Sathyanatha Aiyar and C.S.Srinivasachariar to teach him the histories; P.S.Naidu taught him Logic and Ramanujachariar Philosophy, he learnt his Economics from masters of Public Finance like M.K.Muniswamy. He learnt his Tamil from reputed scholars like S.Somasundara Bharathiar, R.P.Sethupillai, N.M.Venkatasami Nattar and his own father N.Balarama Aiyar. None better in these fields of study could be found in the state, then. They have not been surpassed yet. He was not merely their student, but a sort of intellectual companion, and had the good fortune to move closely with stalwarts like S.E.Runganathan, the first Vice-Chancellor of the University but even more so with his successor in office, the Rt. Hon’ble V.S.S.Sastriar. He had to contact them often in the capacity of the Secretary of the University History Students’ Association.

---

2. He is particularly well up in Modern and Perspective logic, developed in the post John Stuart Mill era.

3. The early deciding influences were the Annamalai University Library, the home environment enveloped in a bookish atmosphere, and the University Students’ Union.

4. The author of the *Four Chola Temples* and other well-known works.
Brought up in this manner, it is no wonder that his lectures in the classrooms (in the 1960s and 1970s) went somewhat above the heads of the average students, some of whom came from rural establishments, where bad Tamil and worse English were taught. N.S. was rather particular about grammar; solecisms hurt him. But the better students got to know the old type uncompromising scholar in him. That is why the first two principals of AMJC had high regard for him.

Being brought up in a hard school of history where scholarly discipline as well as intellectual freedom was preached and practised, he developed from the very beginning an attitude of agnosticism-questioning till (to him) satisfactory answers were received, which have become second nature to him; and his study of logic helped him in this. He could treat any subject, mentally of course always, and occasionally in the university students’ union debates, with the cynical detachment, bordering on scorn, which characterised Gibbon’s treatment of Christianity. This was even then mistaken for a sort of youthful irreverence inbred in him.

N.S. did his Lord Bryce, Alexis de Tocqueville, Mckechnie, Davies and the Tudor and Stuart Constitutional statutes like the Habeas Corpus and so on, not to speak of the multivolume Laws of England by Holdsworth, as also Dunning’s multivolume History of Political Thought – not exactly for the sake of the examination or a degree or any job, a salary or a living; but for their own sake. He read Acton, Wakeman, Bury, and Trevelyan for a similar reason. He supplemented the clearly historical works, by reading with profit and pleasure, - and this became a life time habit with him - Dumas, Dickens,

5. That is from the point of view of Professor Subrahmanian, who had the good fortune to be taught his Tamil and his English from some of the best teachers of those times.
6. Gibbon, E. Decline and fall of the Roman Empire.
Hugo and Scott for their historical novels. The root cause for all this enthusiasm must have been the great teachers who taught him and at home his father who was an exemplar in this regard of a perpetually and untiringly reading habit. He had equal interest in allied as well as any intellectually interesting and stimulating discipline; though even then he was not unacquainted with the main principles of Darwin, and Freud not to speak of even pure science. Philosophers from Plato – Aristotle, to Bertrand Russell through F.Bacon and J.S.Mill. This comprehensive interest – was not easy to acquire, nor the knowledge enough to consume all his time nor clear all his doubts. He still spared time for his advanced and ancient Tamil, which he learnt with his father. He was much interested in Sir James Frazer’s *Golden Bough* and Sir Havelock Ellis’ *Psychology of Sex* and Sir.R.Burton’s full translation of the *Arabian Nights*.

This kind of perpetual study at the expense of sports – except chess which he liked much and extra curricular activities other than the University Students’ Union debates – earned for him the rather unenviable nickname of ‘a book worm’. But he took comfort in Prof.V.Saranathan’s⁷ acute observation that ‘bookworms are better than illiterate worms’.⁸

Even then he could see the difference between the European literary culture which had even at its earliest stages to its credit writers like Herodotus and Thucydides and that of Indian (Tamilnad) literary tradition in which history was a conspicuous absentee.

The Philosophy of history, which had such early beginnings later developed into a passion for Historiography as a discipline. Therefore when

---

7. Formerly famous principal of the National College, Trichy
8. Said in the course of a lecture Saranathan delivered to the Annamalai University Students’ Union.
he started P.G. History course in the Madurai University\textsuperscript{9} he, for the first time in the history of Indian Universities, introduced Historiography as a compulsory subject (1970) taught it himself and wrote the first book on that subject in that compass in India (1973). The first edition of that work still remains the most authoritative and informative book on that subject. He knew the purpose of history\textsuperscript{10} and historical studies; and having read Bury, Grote, Gibbon, Macaulay, Ranke and Trevelyan as well as Toynbee and Spengler he could not help believing in the objective, distant, non-aligned approach to history and its problems and personalities and institutions and the pitfalls in biased history. He used to forget his personal identity as an oriental – Indian – Tamilian – Brahmin etc. while writing the history of any country including India. He developed consciously and on principle the capacity to be – as far as is humanly possible – unbiassed and secular; for he had defined history as a compound of time and space – its two coordinates, both of them secular. He rather agreed with H.A.L. Fisher’s statement about History being a series of accidental occurrences,\textsuperscript{11} than with the determinists like Plato to Marx or Toynbee or Spengler; he believed in the Philosophy of History and Science as propounded by Popper as said above and in Barraclaugh’s theory of universal history. So he was opposed to motivated history, whatever the motivation; i.e. even if it were very noble otherwise. It could be as high and universal as

\textsuperscript{9} Vide f.n 53 Ch.1
\textsuperscript{10} And verified for himself why Francis Bacon said that the 'Histories make men wise'.
\textsuperscript{11} H.A.L. Fisher, the author of the History of Europe, disclaimed ability to discover 'a plot, a rhythm, and a pre determined pattern in history.' Later on K.R. Popper in his 'Open Society and its Enemies' agreed with him and said that the predetermination theory was untenable "because a clear distinction must be made between 'scientific predictions' which are usually conditional and 'historical prophecies' which have to be unconditional. The historian does not derive his historical prophecies from conditional scientific predictions because he cannot do so, since long term prophecies can be derived from scientific conditional predictions only if they apply to systems which can be described as well isolated, stationary and recurrent". N.Subrahmanian: Historiography – I ed. P.109.
Marx’s complicated socio-economic concepts or as low as cheap and unscientific and merely patriotic local history. Both he spurned with great revulsion.

In the middle of the last century and its later half there developed different schools of history in India, each one trying to fashion the historical outlook of students by teaching as per its notions of history assisted suitably by text books written by its group. These schools of historical thought and particularly interpretation became academic commitments to the concerned groups and they spread them with almost religious fervor. It is well-known as indicated by A.B.Keith12 that in the vast quantity of Sanskrit literature, history alone (with scientific geography, no doubt) remains unrepresented. It is true of all Indian literatures, not excluding Tamil.13 The Muslims wrote history but it was largely court history. Regular organized historical literature did not exist.14 Indian students who had studied in the Universities which were started in the days of Dalhousie (middle of the 19th century) learnt history and by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century had begun to do historical research and write historical works themselves. Robert Orme (1728-1801) wrote his Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from 1745 and started the tradition of historical writing in India. That was followed by James Mill’s History of India15 and Grant Duff’s History of the Marathas (1810) and J.D. Cunningham’s History of the Sikhs and a few other works of

12. A.B.Keith: History of Sanskrit literature (pp. 144 to 147).
13. The colophons to ancient poems and the epigraphs and traditional accounts of particular institutions are not historical literature comparable to Herodotus, Thucydides or Tacitus.
14. This point has been elaborately dealt with by N.S. in his Historiography in the chapter on ‘Indian Historical Tradition’ as also in the early part of his Tamilian Historiography.
15. James Mill had never visited India but wrote adversely critically about Indian culture in general, even as Edmund Burke who too had never visited India wrote very highly about the Indians.
that kind; till in Tamilnad Caldwell wrote the *History of Tinnnevell* (local history) in the second half of the century, there was no modern type of history in the South. The Europeans wrote either factual history based on the official records or justificatory history, explaining the benefits conferred by British rule in India. Before the end of the century however due to the efforts of western scholars like Prinseps (who deciphered the Brahmi script) and A. Cunningham (1814 – 1893) famous for his *Book of Eras* and the *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum I* western historians began to unravel the mystery of ancient India through archaeology which reached its pinnacle in the days of Mortimer wheeler.

So by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Indian scholars trained in English Schools were proficient enough to write books of history and work in the field of archaeology. R.G.Bhandarkar in Maharashtra and P.Sundaram Pillai and V.Kanagasabhai in Tamilnad may be considered some of the earliest Indians to write history. But the upheavals in the socio-religious field in the 19th century, generally called a ‘renaissance’ brought about a qualitative change in Indian writing of the history of India. The Mutiny of 1857 may be supposed to be the cutoff point.

Indian nationalism – this is N.S.’ theory – began to interpret the History of past India (which was by the way introduced and taught to it by western historiographers, archaeologists and numismatists) from a defensive nationalist point of view to counter as it were the aggressively anti-Hindu (Indian) interpretations of James Mill and the like; and a resentment against

---

16. N.S. does not approve of this word being applied to the changes attempted to be brought about by well intentioned reformers like Ram Mohan Roy to Vivekananda. He says, the expression ‘renaissance’ is inappropriate in the Indian context and one should speak only of a ‘new birth and not a ‘rebirth’ For in India there was no St.Thomas Aquinas standing between Aristotle and Francis Bacon.
Lord Macaulay’s uncomplimentary references to Sanskrit and Arabic literatures. The pendulum swung to the opposite end. No one thought either of a via media approach or an original thought about it. Golden ages and foreign aggressors had to be highlighted; after the Mutiny, the British attitude to India, in a general sense hardened and Vincent Smith, P.E. Roberts and others began to take either a dim view of Hindu India or write merely the administrative history of India—opinion free—as in the Cambridge History later volumes. A few honourable exceptions like R.Bhandarkar, J.C. Sircar and Sardesai were good exceptions whose reverence for truthful history was patent. It was tainted neither by imperialist defensive attitudes nor utilitarian moral condescension or nationalist patriotic misrepresentations. It was objective history based on an unbiased study of all the then available source material and looked at from all points of view. A work like J.C. Sircar’s Aurangzeb (5 vols) has not yet been surpassed. These historians and objective archaeologists like Marshall were the role models for N.S. Within a few years after N.S. took to teaching history even at the Pre-University level, he had formed definite opinions about the nature of ideal history. In his ‘Man and His World’ he quotes Geoffrey Barraclaugh; “It is only a history that is universal in spirit—history that looks beyond Europe and the West” (“Indian students may read India and the East here”) to humanity in all lands and ages—that can serve our purposes … The world is one, and whether we like it or not, the fortunes of every one of us are linked to the fortunes of all the others.17 Perhaps this was the beginning of N.S.’ advocacy of a world state. If there is to be a world state, the only history then would be the universal history which would be an improvement on what even Barraclaugh advocated. There will only be a history of the world and then all histories now called national

17. Man and his world: Introduction, P.iv—quoted from G. Barraclaugh’s History in a changing World (Blackwell). Though the book was authored by two professors, it was N.S. who wrote the introduction.
histories will become merely regional or parochial history. N.S. argues that the alleged impracticability of this idea, dependent mostly on the current vested interests of warmongers cannot mean its undesirability. On the other hand respectable intellectuals like Bertrand Russell have advocated a world state.

As a historian, N.S.' advocacy of a world state is based mainly on two ideas: 1. It can end the mischievous interventions by organized religions in international affairs; e.g. terrorism generated by religious fundamentalism; it can make the world truly secular so far as government is concerned. 2. It can end nationalist (patriotic) etc. fervor (frenzy). These two factors have been largely responsible for wars (local as well as world or international) in this world. Gibbon said correctly, that the glory and prosperity and culture of the Western Roman Empire were ended by "barbarism and religion". Then the barbarians were the Goths and religion was Christianity. N.S. had developed this argument for explaining the fall of the Tamil Sañgam culture (and the kind of literature it generated) as the result of the (barbarian i.e. foreign or non-Tamil) Kalabhra invasion; and religion – the beginning of the Bhakti age. The combination of nationalism and organized religion – even the Hindu religion came to be organized to some extent after the advent of Sañkara who established Mathas for the propagation of particular religious ideas and superseded even the political state in its social reverential position – lead to obsessive local conflicts which fail to get resolved because of the permanent difference in religious values, and assumptions as well as of territorial nationalist pride and ambition. The words jingoism, chauvinism, sub-nationalism, regionalism etc. are used to make 'nationalism' respectable. It is only an enlarged version of these petty scourges. It is superscourge, according to N.S. A few thousand power holders in the world have a vested interest in the continuation of the 'Sovereign Nation State' so that they can
continue to get the benefit of the power they now enjoy and they try to continue in power as long as they can. The truly democratic non-warring state is a myth, though a very good one worth aspiring to. The status quo is either attempted to be preserved for it facilitates making money by sale of arms all over the world and making these arms progressively deadly; and the resultant beneficiary is not the common man.18

‘History’ has been variously defined by different thinkers; some taking it to metahistorical heights, others reducing it to local levels; but N.S. defines history as ‘the social memory of the past’ induced more by curiosity than by a conscious desire to learn lessons. Even if there be such a wish, generally man rarely learns by experience. He commits the mistakes again.19 History is secular, bound by time and space and does not deal with the universe and eternity. History is to be a true, factual account of the more important persons, events and institutions of the past; and therefore he does not believe in historians taking into account superstitions, the supernormal, the supernatural, the miraculous etc. All these have a primitive (and to some extent even modern) religious flavour and often woven into and as history by men of religion who impress the uncultivated masses and keep their faith intact or even expand it if possible. He tries to give normal, human, scientific, credible explanations to all such references in historical records. Some incredibly horrible things like the Inquisition, Hitler’s Concentration Camps, the impaling of 8000 Jains in Madurai have all been reported and they could have happened. There is no inherent impossibility in such cases. But there are clearly impossible things defying reason, which are at times reported, and these must be rejected as irrational.

18. These questions with N.S’ preference to a world Government will be taken up again when his approach to world politics is discussed in the next chapter.

19. These and allied ideas are dealt with by N.S. in his Historiography I ed. 1st chapter on ‘Definition’.
N.S. prefers to take a worldview of events so that historical events can be understood in proper proportion; though a worm’s eye view may be useful in knowing the exact dimensions of all necessary facts.

N.S. while advising the historical researcher insists on keeping forever in mind the importance of ‘objectivity’ as an attitude of the critical mind. This has been extensively discussed in his *Historical Research Methodology* and *Historiography*. There is a higher level criticism, which questions the possibility of total objectivity. This is not unknown to N.S. who says that ‘total objectivity’ is a theoretical goal but trying to achieve it must be a sincere attempt.

To him a historian’s function is only to record the past like an annalist, not to subjectively represent the present or motivated by ideology predict a future. The choice of a topic is necessarily subjective within reasonable limits, and then the historian, must collect the material judiciously, sit in judgment like a wise and impartial judge whose values will no doubt be predetermined by what he thinks is justice. At every point there is an unavoidable element of subjectivity. But that cannot be helped and that need not worry one as long as virtue is the end in view.

A historian has to judge but not pre-judge. One’s own good conscience and the virtuous laws and traditions governing the discipline are not to be lost sight of. It is in this spirit he taught in the classroom, spoke from on public platforms to general audiences and wrote his books and participated in learned seminars – irrespective of consequences, good and gainful or bad and painful. He has survived minor troubles but this attitude of objectivity has cost him the chances of secular betterment, which he does not regret, but perhaps is at heart proud of.
This resulted in a certain situation in his career as a historian and needs mention. Generally speaking during the past half century there were five kinds of historians (they were all reputed) who wrote the History of India (the full history or any part of it): 1. the foreign scholars (i.e. most of them) took a condescending sympathetic view of what is happening in India suggesting dimly that nothing more could be expected from them.20 2. The post British Government of India wanting to be patriotically different from much of what the pre-1947 government did here took the view that a rewriting of certain sensitive parts of ancient and modern India is needed; and so embarked on the project initiated by the Govt. of India and which ended in the classic 1857 by Surendranath Sen. The foreword to that work by the then Minister for Education reveals the mind of the Govt. 3. The 'patriotic' scholars wanting to emphasise the glory of India's past and speak of golden ages and the limitless wisdom of the ancient seers and so on or invent a few if necessary to strengthen their case. To them Islamic, British and even Buddhist governments of India were of little moment compared to the Guptan etc. An author actually claimed that Asoka was a Hindu who never turned Buddhist.21 4. There were the ideologists – the Marxists.22 5. Then we have the Muslim historians who counter the Hindu Historian’s criticism of Muslim invaders and rulers from Ghazni to Aurangzeb and try to reconstruct the medieval history of India in such a way as to deny the criticism from the other side. 6. Then there were the regional historians who made mountains out of molehills and to whom the greatest Indian heroes were Ranjit Singh, Sivaji or Kattabomman etc. depending upon the region to which the historian belonged. There need be no doubt that N.S. was greatly amused and revolted by all these ideologies. In his simplicity he could not see the psychic complexes working

20. Examples are not given to avoid the impression of hostile discrimination.
22. Vide fn.20
in all these cases. He says plainly that in a humanist discipline like history one must not be dogmatic in one's assertions. All historical statements have to be qualified by reservations, since theoretical generalizations, hearsays and even personal knowledge in the case of large societies and long periods of time become fruitless. He harks back to H.A.L. Fisher and K.R. Popper.

In these circumstances in Delhi there arose a trend of scholarly historians who thought all history— not excluding Indian, ancient or modern — can be and ought to be explained only from the Marxist point of view. This had the support of the then Government of India which believed in the socialist order of things. They believed that that angle alone would point to historical truth. Following the Hegelian principle, this had its reaction in another camp of historians (mostly Hindu) who patriotically dissented and opposed the former view. There were official agencies like the U.G.C. and the NCERT who published and recommended or prescribed text books written by the members of the institutions favored by the Government of the day. Thus the Marxist view came to prevail at all levels of historical teaching, though of course there was no official fiat or compulsory directive in this regard. Things happened quietly in a certain required way. In 1977 the Government, which by the 42nd amendment of the constitution in 1976 included the word ‘socialist’ to the Preamble, fell; and was succeeded by others who had no objection to revise the previous opinion on historiography at the instance of those who revived the issue in parliament in the later months of 1977. The new Govt. had a new Minister for Education who had to meet such questions in parliament and he decided to consult experts as to what stand the

23. The explanation usually offered to the word 'socialism' spoke about a Gandhian element in it.
Government should take in such cases. N.S. was one of the experts consulted in this matter.²⁴

To the above request, N.S. replied in substance as follows; "Historical facts, however bitter, must be told; those who feel too delicate to do it must keep away from the terrible task of speaking the truth.....my own suggestion is to have other books written by other scholars and to get them also prescribed as textbooks alongside this one “(that was sent to him) “so that students will be exposed to all points of view. The suppression of any historical point of view will be undesirable”. This correspondence makes it evident that N.S. was 1. Intolerant of error and at the same time 2. a staunch supporter of freedom of expression. These have characterized all his teachings, speeches and writings.

N.S' views on this matter can be summarized as follows. The civil war among ideological historians has not abated. It is bound to go on till a genuine liberal outlook pervades the educational system in the country. The scarlet fever in the historical mind is highly infectious and spreads easily among the poorer sections of the community. The saffron or the yellow fever is even more dangerous for with the former at least you can hold a dialogue but with the latter no intellectual transaction is possible. For though both are fanatics, the former is intellectual fanaticism or dogmatism decried by K.R. Popper, while the latter is entirely sentimental, superstitious and Hindu nationalistic. The Aligarh School can afford to lie low and await the result of the scarlet vs. the yellow. “The country's intellectual history has had many ups and downs. This is one of the downs. A historian needs to be a philosopher transcendental of fashion or profit”. These are his very words, which he permitted me to

²⁴. N.S. then was Prof. of History in the NEHU, Shillong and firmly well known for his 'liberal' views. Other particulars regarding the correspondence between the Ministry and the Professor are not given, for they are not germane N.S’ views on the subject.
quote. N.S’ views on the matter are quite strong. He still clings to the old Trevelyan type liberalism in his historical theory.

It has been noticed that N.S. believes that judgement (assessment) is part of a historian’s job. Judgement depends on the critical faculty. He developed this idea in a seminar on Historiography held under the auspices of the Institute of Traditional Cultures on 1-2-1962. “He (N.S.) has classified the human intellectual function into the scientific, the critical (historical, literary included) and metaphysical”. Here the scientific does not involve social or any other kind of criticism while the metaphysical is theoretical and abstract; and the critical belongs only to the ‘historical’. This may be compared to G.M. Trevelyan’s ‘three distinct functions’ of history which he called 1) the scientific 2) the imaginative and 3) the literary. Anyhow N.S. is insistent that ‘the critical’ is an essential aspect of history. N.S. however somehow wishes to combine Ranke’s objectivity with Acton’s moral inflexibility. He presumes that the historian has a moral norm, which will be the justification for the historian’s criticisms.25

N.S. has no doubt that history has no lessons to teach. The lessons might be implied in the historical process; but man never learns those lessons. It is his view that experience has no or little effect on human conduct. History therefore, according to him has no didactic purpose.

Of all his ideas on history however, objectivity and sympathy are the most important26. A study of his numerical historical works, in English as well as in Tamil, will show that he has himself, tried to practise these

25. N.S.’ Historiography (I.ed) P.27,
26. ‘Sympathy’ here merely means the necessary temper on the part of a critic to suppose that the man who holds a different view can also be in the right. For unlike in the precise sciences, in the humanities there can be more than one valid point of view.
precepts. But he has contributed so many original ideas to history, sociology and literature that complete sympathy with those who differ from him cannot be expected.

We shall consider herebelow the quality and history of N.S.’ purely historical writings:

I. Man and his world:

This is the first book on history written by N.S. It was in 1956 and intended for the pre-university students (who now may be treated as the same as the +2 History students). That was the first book written with that readership in mind and the authorship was shared by Prof. T.Dhanakoti of the Thyagarajar College, Madras. The latter author wrote only 3 out of the 30 chapters (ie. VI, VII, and VIII) in the book. The rest were all written by N.S. In fact Prof. Dhanakoti joined as a co-author only after nearly half the book had been planned and the chapters outlined and the earlier ones written. N.S. was responsible for the learned introduction (which seems to be intended mostly for the teacher and the scholarly general reader than for the average pupil), the appendices, the maps, and the Index. The language was also uniformed by him so that a variation in style may not be too intrusive in different chapters.

Sir C.P. Ramasami Aiyar has stated “I consider your handbook ‘Man and his World’ as a marvel of compression and of accurate perspectives. You have performed your onerous task in a comprehensive and a critically balanced spirit. Your narration of the development of Roman Polity and of the Medieval Period of Indian History as well as the account of the rise and fall of

27. Who was then the Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University.
the Holy Roman Empire of the later middle ages in Europe is praiseworthy'. Coming from such a quarter the comments may be considered very valuable.

It is retrospectively interesting to note that N.S. who believed so much in universal history wrote first a ‘World History.’ The book sold well. But declining standards soon discovered that the language in which the book communicated was too tough for the new generation of students coming up. The authors however, though, more of universal quality than of local competence. Sentences like ‘The Muslim temple is a simple structure; where prayers are said and the Koran is read’ came naturally to the author. The book is to be read not only for its history but for its English too.

II. An Introduction to the Cultural History of India:

This small book of 115 odd pages was published in July 1959 at the instance of Prof. T. Balakrishna Nayar, the then Principal of the Presidency College, Madras, to suit the requirements of the undergraduate students of science who were obliged to study a non-science subject: one of them was the Cultural History of India. This is a broad outlined and is in eight short chapters deals with the Cultural History of India. To N.S. the word ‘culture’ had always been allergic for like ‘dharma’ it meant many different things to many different people and at many different times. It exasperates N.S: He admitted this.

28. The introduction to the book quotes Barraclough’s History in a Changing World to seek support for a Universal History. When prof. R. Bhaskaran who had first advised the production of this work was informed that the book sold exceedingly well, he replied ‘I never thought that your book would be so bad as to sell so fast.’

29. This could be said of all his books; and applied to his history books written in Tamil too, mutatis mutandis.

III. This book was soon after translated into Tamil for the benefit of pupils who did their History in Tamil at the undergraduate level. These two books were written as textbooks but in his original manner of thought and expression unmindful of the objections, which might have been entertained by a certain order of pupils who would have been taught bad history in worse English or Tamil as the case may be. But they were not the product of research work. Some substantial historical research he had to do when he undertook to write the prefaces (English and in Tamil) to his edition of the Ānāhrdaṅgaṅ Kōvai (1956) – 25 pages of research material. His biography of V.G. Suryanarayana Sastriar (1950) did not involve much serious research though a few documents and books had to be referred to.

IV. Śaṅgam Polity:

The most serious ‘research’ work he has done so far is the Śaṅgam Polity, his thesis for the title of Doctor of Philosophy of the Annamalai University. It stands as one of the historical classics written by historians of Indian origin and it has very few peers. He started work on the subject, which was already familiar to him in a great way as a student not only of Indian History but also of ancient Tamil, particularly, Śahgam Literature. He began work on the subject in 1955 and got the degree of Ph.D in 1959. It was a passport to lasting fame among Indian historians but also to the faculty of history at the University of Madras. The Asia Publishing House, Bombay, brought out the first edition of the work in 1966.

The book is in three parts. 1. An introduction (PP 1 to 32). 2. Governmental Polity (PP-33 to 244) and 3. Social Polity (pp.245 to 391) followed by two Appendixes. It does not deal with the political history of the period, which according to him extended from 500 B.C. to A.D.300 (followed by two centuries of Kalabhra interregnum). Though the treatment is
sympathetic to ancient Sañgam Tamil culture for which evidently he has a partiality, calling it a feature of a golden age, his actual phrasing and attitude and handling of immense material is clinically neutral, objective, unsparing, occasionally humorous and full of unforgettable passages of description: To give only a few examples: 1. It would be wrong to use latter day expressions, to denote primitive institutions.31 'The drunkards’ walk to the toddy shop was a pilgrimage to the drink-house.’32 ‘To enjoy this spirituous drink better they used to have bits of ginger with them; to ensure an unfailing and ready supply to these ginger bits, they were strung along with flowers in the garlands which they wore and a sip at the toddy bowl and a bite at the ginger bit alternated to the great pleasure of the eating party.’33 'Undraped womanhood bedecked in flowers finds frequent mention in early Tamil literature.’34 There are categorical statements, which contrast with the earlier ambiguities; e.g., “If the king was a cruel despot, the people only felt miserable and complained that ‘their lord was a cruel man’. So royal authority was irresistible even if wrongfully exercised.”35

This is the only work on this subject of equal dimensions and information properly authenticated and classically worded. This persuaded his doctoral guide and Professor R.Sathyanatha Aiyar to entitle him ‘the historian of the Sañgam age.’36

Two points of criticism which are valid in their own way must be mentioned. One is that the section on numismatic evidence on P.17 of the 1st

32. Ibid. P.320.
33. S.P.P.308.
34. Ibid: P.310.
35. Ibid. P.376.
36. Foreword by Prof.R.S. Vide S.P.V.
ed. is outdated in view of later discoveries of Śaṅgam age coins. This was corrected only in the III ed. of the work (1996). Secondly he does not enter into even a cursory criticism of the major data assigning different dates to the age by other critics. This makes critics object to his using the Nāladiyār as literary source material for this work. The same objection has been raised in regard to N.S’ dating of Śaṅgam works. A certain school of critics date the Tolkāppiyam and the Kuṟal also to post Śaṅgam periods and are doubtful about the Kalittogai and the Paripāṭal also likewise.

In fact Śilappadikāram and Manimēgalai have suffered most at the hands of these chronologists. N.S. uses the Śilappadikāram extensively for his purposes of explaining the Śaṅgam Polity.

But apart from the innumerable items of information, fully authenticated by reference to original sources indicated in the footnotes, there is one major contribution in the Śaṅgam Polity to early Tamil historical political thought, which is original. This contribution by N.S. has corrected the romantic view spread by Dr. S. Krishnaswami Aiyangar and V.R.R. Dikshitar in their treatment of Hindu Political Institutions that the powers of the kings were controlled by various nonconstitutional, non-political constraints and the result was peaceful good government. The fact that absence of constitutional checks made tyranny possible and easy for ancient Tamil monarchy was for the first time made clear by N.S. The book received world wide recognition within a year of its publication; it is very widely

37. Following Mr. S. Vaiyapuripillai’s late dating of the Nāladiyār i.e. practically to the 8th century A.D., the general view has come to treat that Jaina text as a Post-Śaṅgam work. But N.S. tends to place it before A.D. 600 by all means.

38. Dr. Derrett observed in his foreword to the Hindu Tripod and other Essays as follows: “Subramanian’s first work (Śaṅgam Polity, New York etc. A.P.H. 1966) was original research, carefully documented, showing unmistakably that........... meticulous scholarship, forthright speech, and the absence of overt bias could be expected from him.......” P.X Foreword.
reviewed. In India Mr.H.D. Sankalia’s long review in the *Times of India*, Bombay dt. 14.4.1968 was almost reproduced in the Bharathia Vidyabhaban’s Journal. In a letter on 21.8.1970 Mr.I.Mahadevan, the great epigraphist and specialist in Harappan studies wrote “It is well on its way to becoming a classic treatise on the subject”.

V. *Saṅgakāla Vāṭivīyal*:

This book was one of those recommended to be translated into 12 leading Indian languages; but it was translated actually only into Kannada by one Prof. Niranjan of the Mysore University; and the other translation was into Tamil as *Saṅgakāla Vāṭivīyal* by N.S. himself which he did in 1977. The original was awarded a certificate of recognition and a cash prize by the Government of Madras in 1970; and the Tamil translation was awarded similar recognition by the Tanjore Tamil University in April 1990. The book was sponsored by the ICHR Delhi and printed by the NCBH Madras and is currently out of print. The Tamil style of the translation tries its best not only to convey the content of the original but also maintain a high standard of Tamil style, rarely attained by historical works written in Tamil, except those written by senior Tamil scholars like M.Raghava Aiyangar.

VI. *Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index*:

(Index of Historical material in Pre-Pallavan Tamil Literature): This is the product of N.S.’ official research work at the Madras University during 1960-1964. It was finalised in 1965 and printed and published in 1966. It is one of the largest and most used books he has written; it is in 823+XVI pages (11ed.1996). It has an introductory index which introduces the 44 texts indexed and is followed by the main text which is an exhaustive index of all words of any historical or allied importance in the Tamil alphabetical order but the text itself is only in English. The English (Roman) script is adopted;
meanings of words in different contexts are given and original explanation offered in many places like e.g. Aindiram (கெற்று) P. 175. It is a concordance.

N.S. is a firm believer in research based on original sources as far as possible. Whenever the original source is available it must be used. There are many good English, French or German translations – very dependable because authentic – which will be enough to serve that purpose. The European translations of Indian texts had in the earlier period concentrated on Sanskrit and Pali and later on Persian or Urdu. Tamil did not receive similar attention; and a few scholars took the trouble to translate their Tamil classics into English. A few were translated but not all. N.S. wished to provide compendiously as much source material for the Tamil research student as he could. That would not only save time but also give the student access to the learned thoughts of the editor of the source material. N.S. concentrated mainly on the Śaṅgam literature; for even for his Ph.D. thesis on the Śaṅgam polity he had done so. Now he continued the effort to provide the source material for the early Tamil historical period; and to him the pre-A.D. 600 period is of primary importance. Therefore epigraphy takes over the role of literature and much foreign and native work has been done in the field of epigraphy.

In this text too, to the author, A.D. 600 is the upper limit of all pre-Pallavan history, ignoring the history of the early Pallavas. To him A.D. 600 is an important cutoff point in early Tamil History, for it was then that the Pandiyan History was revived after the Kaḷabhrās and in Kanchi Imperial Pallava rule began.

This is how the Pre-Pallavan Index came to be written. This is one of the three major reference works by him: 1. *The Pre Pallavan Index*; 2. *Original Sources for the history of Tamilnad* (up to A.D. 600); 3. *The Kūṟai*
Concordance. The Pre-Pallavan Index, as stated above has been very widely used; and mostly favorably commented upon: Prof. T. Burrow of the Indian Institute, Oxford wrote: “You have done for old Tamil what the Vedic Index did for Vedic literature; and in that work significant words as well as names have been included thus increasing its utility.” A letter from Dr. B. J. Kuiper, Kern Institute, Leiden (Holland) said: “your monumental work gives access to a vast literature and you are entitled to gratitude of all future workers in the field”. Prof. R. E. Asher of the Edinburgh University said: “A preliminary glance at this Index makes it quite clear that Prof. Nilakanta Sastri is fully justified in his comments. Indeed the book will be invaluable not only to historians but also to students of Tamil language and early Tamil literature”. Dr. Zvelabil (Orientalini Ustat) of Czechoslovakia wrote: “It is definitely most valuable not only to the historians but to the historical linguist” etc. Prof. K. A. N. Sastri remarked in his review of the book that “this book is a basic source book intended to help scholars engaged in Tamil Historical research and has for long been a desideratum… The author has made the scope of the work deliberately wide for every reference in every text can have some social historical significance or other. The Index is clearly the result of painstaking research and this can be seen in entries like Ay (4), Kuttuvan (12), Gōtamanar, Vānavaramban etc... This is a timesaving reference book which no historical researcher can afford to go without.”

It is interesting to learn from this index that words like sōdu – sandals and sādi: jar were used by Tamil poets who wrote more than 1600 years ago.

39. The last one is of special interest to the student of Tamil Literature.
41. Letter dt. 2.9.1966
42. Letter dt. 5.9.1966
43. In the Hindu dt. 14. 8.1966
44. Kālavāli (40): 9:2.
VII. Original Sources of Tamilnad History (up to A.D.600):

While we are with the reference books created by N.S., we could as well mention here his *Original Sources of Tamilnad History* (up to A.D.600) which is another very important source book for the historical researcher interested in early Tamil history. It is the only book of its kind and equal utility for the period concerned. Its value consists in its being unique and exhaustive. It divides the text into eight parts: Sanskrit, Pali, and Tamil Classical texts; Hebrew, Greek and Latin, Chinese, Epigraphic, Numismatic and miscellaneous. Already existing standard translations of these items of source material have been adopted; but for Tamil many original passages in the Śaṅgam texts remained untranslated; and N.S. has translated them all; so that the entire book is in English with English translation for every bit of original source material bearing on the history of Tamilnad for that period. The language and location of the source also have been indicated in all cases. In the miscellaneous section, whatever has been omitted in the earlier parts of the book has been included and they are not many; and also includes statements by Caldwell and Warmington. This piece of useful research was the product of a fellowship offered by the ICHR and published by Ennes Publications of Udumalpet in 1994. The great value of this work is that the researcher in early Tamil History can be content with this single book as a reference source. This work has no parallel, while later i.e. post A.D. 600 History has been amply dealt with with the help of epigraphy and other archaeological aids.

VIII. Tamil Epigraphy:

N.S. is essentially a historian with a literary bias lurking in the background and obvious in his writings. But it is not as if he has had little to

46. R.Caldwell: *Comparative Philology of Dravidian Languages.*
47. Warmington, E.H.: *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India,* P. 93
do with archaeology but his interest in it has been minimal. He has written a book entitled *Tamil Epigraphy* (1980). The co-author of the book was Prof. R. Venkatraman. This book of just over 175 pages gives a succinct account of the significance of the major Tamil inscriptions. It gives in many places the Tamil original and explanation in English. The Historical importance of the epigraphs is pointed out. The book begins with a history of Tamil Epigraphy. The contribution in various fields made by epigraphy to Tamil political as well as cultural history is spotlighted in this work. The European contribution made, beginning with George Buhler (1837-1898), and ending with M.Wheeler, is given its due importance. The book contains some outline figures, the Tamil Brahmi script, three appendixes and a glossary. This was a diversion for N.S. In a personal chat, with N.S. in Guntur in 1980 Dr. D.C. Sircar praised the work. But N.S.’ interest in any aspect of archaeology as stated above was only minimal.

N.S.’ insatiable interest in preparing source books and interesting on his pupils going to them for their basic guidance did not stop with history and archaeology. It extended to Tamil literature also; and he prepared, what was badly needed for the most famous book in Tamil.

**IX. The Tirukkūṟal, a Concordance:**

This is a work of great importance as well as of magnitude. The concordance itself is only in just 250 pages, which includes an Index of Pāls, Iyals and Adikārams as also charts and an analysis. Thus it is quite exhaustive in regard to the information it gives regarding every word and phrase in the text in its different senses and various locations. To any student who wishes lexical information regarding the *Kūṟal* need seek no other help.

---

48 Prof. R.Venkatraman was the Faculty member of School of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University.
It is self-explanatory everywhere. But this may be treated as hard clerical work by a diligent student at best. But there is an introduction to the work in 127 pages and it deals as no other work in Tamil or in English, has done to the Kuṟaḻ what this introduction, has done. It is an elaborate treatise on the moral philosophy, which the famous text wishes to convey. It has 15 divisions and 15 ideas are discussed therein. The more important among them being: 1. The Kuṟaḻ, the Vedās and the Gītā, 2. Proverbial literature, 3. Sin and crime, 4. Rights and duties, 5. Truth, 6. Fate, 7. Woman and 8. Drink and gambling; all this is followed by a long essay on ‘Tirukkuṟaḻ and Western Political thought’—a kind of comparative study rarely attempted by Indian writers, along the lines adopted by N.S., There is also a reference analysis, which facilitates easy location of important phrases. N.S. has made immense contribution to the study of the Tirukkuṟaḻ. Of these, this concordance is perhaps the magnum opus. The rest will be referred to in their respective places. Dr.R.Rajalakshmi so much assisted in the preparation of this work that she is treated as a co-author of this book.

X. History of India:

In between, due to insistent demand from certain quarters he wrote History of India for the Secondary School Students, in 2 books—one for the IX and the other for X standard. These are not, like his much earlier History book written in Tamil and called XI Varalāṟṟu Nūḷ for the lower classes, treated to be N.S.’ contribution to historical literature. They are sort of lecture notes printed for the convenience of examinees. Such efforts, which were mere breadwinners, gave him perhaps a much needed relaxation from his usual hard work.
XII and XIII The History of Tamilnad Vol. I 1973 and II 1977:

The I Vol. coming down to 1336 and the II from then to 1984. These two vols. are a single entity though presented in two vols. These represent the totality of Tamil History in an unprecedented complete outline with details more than enough for postgraduate students. P.T.S. Aiyangar’s History of the Tamils and V.R.R. Dikshitar’s Studies in Tamil literature and history are neither full nor up to date. N.S’ work rectifies both the deficiencies. This is according to many general readers, the most readable of the many histories of the History of Tamilnad. Dr. J.D.M. Derrett remarked: “I can tell that it has original ideas, phrased in your personal style, which gives a special flavor to what could be rather dull.” 49 Supplementing the views of Dr. Derrett who is a sort of authority on South Indian History, 50 N.S. Ramaswami, a scholar – journalist reviewing the book remarked: “It is surprising that we should have had to wait a long time for the History of Tamilnad to be written in English .......... Dr. Subrahmanian picks his way with masterly certitude across the scholarly morass of conjecture and controversy that overlies most of the Pallava, Pândya, Chēra and Chōla epochs of South Indian History. The story gains in vividness in the telling and however familiar one might be with it, one finds many new vistas in Dr.Subrahmanian’s book”. 51 This is high praise. But there is more to be said about this essential contribution to the History of Tamilnad. The two volumes cover the entire story of the Tamils from geography and pre-history to very recent times. But the volumes are more than an elegant rehash of what has often been said. Two or three examples are more than enough to show how N.S.takes his own usually independent view of persons and events. He is of the opinion that Kulōttungā I was a much

50. Dr. J.D.M. Derrett is an author of The Hoysalas.
more model and desirable type of king than the much praised Rājarājā I and his son; for this king who gave tax relief to his subjects, cared more for them than for earning military glory by committing aggression on neighbouring states. Then Sivaji was only a Hindu counterpart of Aurangzeb; only the former was nearly illiterate while the latter was learned; but both were crafty and up to any crime. To him what happened in 1857 was but a North India mutiny and not the First War of Indian Independence. The original ideas he has contributed to the subject are detailed in the chapter, which deals with his style and manner of writing. The originality extends to all fields of his thought. These two vols. of the History of Tamilnad supply the political stuff, which is omitted in the Śaṅgam Polity.

XIV. History of South India:

It has been remarked often before that N.S. wrote books on history and other subjects for the beginners up to the masters; but these two different layers were for two different purposes: one to keep the pot boiling, the other to keep the most aspiring scholars well informed and it provided fresh and original ideas. Both purposes co existed till very late; in fact, one would say, writing for any purpose became physically difficult and clinically forbidden. His passion for the history of the Tamils knew no bounds. But to please a co-author and a publisher he ventured to write the XV first part of a three volume History of South India: He wrote the part dealing with ancient South India; Dr.P.N.Chopra of Delhi wrote the medieval part and Dr. T.K. Ravindran the third and modern part. K.A.N's History of South India down to the end of Vijayanager (in 262 pages), published by Oxford Publishing Company was

52. Vide. fn No.7 under PP.100 and 101 of the 7th ed. 1999.
53. Dr.P.N. Chopra was the Editor of the Gazetteer of India and is currently engaged in publishing the letters and speeches of Vallabhai Patel.
54. Dr. T.K. Ravindran, who was professor of History in the Kerala University, retired as Vice-Chancellor of the Calicut University.
the only textbook in the field but it did not tell the full story; further there was a feeling the book was too much cramped with names and dates and toponyms that a more easily readable book would be welcome. Hence this venture mentioned above and S.Chand and Co, Delhi, Published it (1979). There is nothing special or original about that series except that it is more easily readable than any other in the field.

XV. The Tamils:

To pursue the attempt to give an amount of N.S’ contribution of non-text book material on the History of the Tamils to the advanced students and the informed general reader, it is necessary to mention _The Tamils: their History, Culture and Civilization_ (1996), published by the Institute of Asian Studies, Madras. The short title of the book followed by a long subtitle is self explanatory; i.e. it proposes to tell the story of the Tamil speaking people through the centuries and all aspects of it. The book was favorably reviewed by Dr. K.V. Raman. The book was originally intended to cover a much larger canvas and go into greater details. But circumstances obliged the curtailment of the programme and we have a book of 240 pages written in four main chapters with an epilogue. It was intended to be on a par with A.L. Basham’s _Wonder that was India_; and that fact is indirectly brought to the notice of the reader in the epilogue in which E.A. Poe’s references to ‘the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome’ are made. Prof. Raman really summarizes the work by his following remark. “His deep erudition in Tamil literature and critical and historical perspective has enabled him to present a highly informative and lucid survey of the cultural heritage of the Tamils”. Evidently here ‘culture’ includes politics and civilization. The subtitle of the book however deliberately makes a distinction between (political) history,
culture and civilization: One of the specialties of the book is its treatment of the Lemuria or Kumarikkandam theory as a myth - some very minor parts of it representing ancient social memory like Noah's Ark; and his pointed attention to Anti-History in Tamilnad in particular and in India in general.

XVI to XVIII: Tamil Social History: 3 vols.

The question 'what is N.S' magnum opus? i.e. among, his historical and allied works - Saangam polity or The Hindu Tripod and Other Essays or the three vol. Tamil Social History? or any other remains open. The T.S.H. (all the 3 Vols. altogether) covers 1703 pages and the pattern of chapterisation is the same for all the volumes. The author evidently kept G.M. Trevelyan's English Social History in mind when he entitled his work. But there are basic differences: 1. English Social History begins with the middle of the story and comes down to the modern age; but the T.S.H. covers all Tamil Social History from prehistoric age to the contemporary times. 2. The kind of source material available to the two authors is different; such detailed social information and tradition were available to Trevelyan were denied to the Tamil author. 3. The problems dealt with by the two authors are radically different due to the cultural variance between the English society and the Tamil. It is not as if these three T.S.H. vols. represent the very first attempt at such a history; and N.S. was not unaware of this. He writes: "The only attempt made in that direction was by K.K. Pillai of the University of Madras. His story comes down to c.A.D. 900, and so is incomplete. Even so, on very briefly reviewing

55. 'Culture' is the feature of the cultivated man of character and represents the long distance he has travelled away from the jungle from which he emerged as a fairly wild biped. 'Civilization' on the other hand is the polished polite behavior of the townbred man. It is from the Latin word civilias: urban area. Even now the huge behavioral difference between a villager and a resident of a city is wide and well known. This has little to do with character. Hence the long sub title of the book.

56. N.S.: The Tamils: pp.25, 26, 27
that work we have only to repeat what Vincent Smith said in another context. ‘It is valuable though it does not profess to be the desired book’.”

Each of the three volumes has the same pattern of chapterisation. 1. Introduction, 2. Tamil Social History, 3. Structure and Change, 4. Institutions and their functions, 5. Values and achievements, 6. Conclusion with the usual appurtenances of a bibliography which is quite a long list in each volume considering that the I Vol. alone lists 144 titles and even that he calls select bibliography. The inter chapter references are 1. copious, numerous and 2. throwing into relief original ideas of the author; i.e. the references to chapter I of the volume consist of 231 entries. As an example of originality one can mention entry no: 162 which refers to the verse 145 of Ahanānūṟu. In the introductory chapter, the sub chapter on Avifauna (relating to birds) - pages 96 to 106 – is a remarkable piece of research on birds in the Tamil country of the early times to which references are made in the contemporary literature.

The third vol. covering a short period of 200 years takes more than 600 pages to tell its social history but is very much unlike the previous vols. in the sense that contemporary controversial problems relating to social matters are dealt with in a manner which must have required considerable guts on the part of an academic to express in such detail and so frankly. There is much justification for considering these three vols. (independently as well as collectively) as his magnum opus; but it is also a remarkable fact that there are other works (three or four of them again apart from his creative works) which can successfully compete for that distinction.

57. N.S: T.S.H. Vol I 59. He quotes from Vincent Smith’s Early History of India.
The introductory chapter in the I Vol. is especially valuable because it deals fairly exhaustively with the methodology of social historical research. The third vol. fully and frankly reveals where the author’s social sympathies lie i.e. they are clearly with the woman, the child, the illiterate, the disabled, the materially poor; and it is also clear that he is not satisfied with the remedies to these undesirable situations recommended or adopted; They are deemed insufficient and infructuous. This volume at least of this massive work bears out the truth of what Dr. J.D.M. Derrett has said in his learned foreword to *The Hindu Tripod and other Essays.*

XIX. The History of U.S.A.:

It has often been noted before that N.S. wrote not only research works and novel works of original thought but also text books for postgraduate and undergraduate students. A ‘textbook’ is usually misunderstood as a made – easy for substandard pupils. Even Bury’s *History of Greece* and Tout’s *History of England* were textbooks but their standard of material, style and attitude was such that they were at once classics too. Such were the textbooks on which N.S. himself was nourished. Among the textbooks N.S wrote for college students (in his days the pre university class was part of the college) man and his world was for the beginners.

But at a somewhat higher level he wrote the History of the U.S.A. for the post graduate students; this is so far as historical studies were concerned. He had always three goals in view when he wrote his text books. 1. To

---

58. J.D.M. Derrett: in his foreword to the *H.T. and other Essays*, P. viii. "Rare is the courage to move from original research within the harder fields of Indian History to the compelling questions of our own day...Many a practising historian would be content to claim that serious endeavors and success in Ancient Indian History not only serve as an excuse to escape from responsibility to speak up in our present discontents but operate as a positive disqualification doing so". Except the court historians, N.S. is perhaps the only historian who figures among the exceptions contemplated by Dr. Derrett.
provide information which would be the basis of useful knowledge;  
2. To increase and improve the fund of vocabulary at the student’s command  
by introducing new phrases and idioms and methods of expression to him;  
and 3. to introduce the pupil to new ways of looking at old familiar problems.  
It has never been his aim to anticipate examination questions and provide easy  
answers to them. He always wanted; his pupils to become better scholars and  
not merely help them slip through examinations without too much trouble.

His *History of the U.S.A.* is essentially different from many others  
written by his compatriots in India. There is a vast volume of literature on the  
subject; N.S. concentrates on a few important issues; for example he makes a  
clear distinction between Jeffersonian democracy and Jacksonian democracy  
clearly preferring the former. Even that is not enough for him he accepts  
Abraham Lincoln’s equation of the blacks and the natives and the whites in  
the grand socio – political equation. He distinguishes the six distinct series of  
five great American Presidents from George Washington to F.D. Roosevelt  
through Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson. His assessment of Richard  
Nixon emphasises the role he played in appeasing China and the USSR and in  
easing the cold war and giving Watergate its due place in history. The book  
contains a copy of the US constitution, an appendix and is supported by many  
other Appendices and a few good and useful maps.

N.S. is always a believer, as has been often said before in universal  
history and in the meantime comparative history. He teaches the histories of  
democratic U.S. and of Czarist and Soviet Russia simultaneously so that the  
different ways and speed to abolish slavery in the US and serfdom in Pre –  
Revolution Russia, the social and political conditions created by liberal  
democracy with communist ideology - dominated Soviet Russia. He seems to  
draw the lesson that freedom easily got is always precarious. With these ends  
in view in 1983 he wrote the *History of the U.S.A. XX. The History of U.S.A.*
was written in Tamil also by N.S. i.e. in 1995. XXI. He also wrote a Short History of Russia which included a few chapters on Soviet Russia and brought the story up to date (1982). But students' demand for a more comprehensive work on Russia obliged him to write. XXII. a larger 258 pages History of Russia (1983) in which the 2 parts and 23 chapters with the Appendices constituted the full history of Russia from the beginning to Gorbachev. As in the History of U.S.A the Russian History also contains a copy of the constitution of the U.S.S.R.

XXIII. N.S. the great believer in universal history is naturally quite at home in his book on International Relations (1984) in nearly 300 pages and in 15 chapters with a few appendices and a chronology of main international events. The book contains some very useful Appendices: 1. President Wilson’s 14 points (8.1.1918) 2. The main provisions of the constitution of the League of Nations; 3. The provisions of the Russo – German Non – aggression Pact (23.8.1939); 4. The Four freedoms declared by F.D. Roosevelt; 5. The provisions of the Atlantic Charter; 6. The main provisions of constitution of the United Nations. The Introductory chapter (53 pages) in this work is very important since it contains not only an introduction to modern international relations and diplomacy but introduces the student to what is very essential viz; the principles of international law. The chapter on ‘the aftermath of the war’ and ‘the third world and India’s foreign policy’ provide an original approach to the subjects.

So far N.S. has been reported to have written 24 books as could be seen above. In Tamil he has written XXIV, XXV a two volume History of Tamilnad (Tamlahavaraalu) and a book on XXVI Historiography (Varalaru Varaiyival) apart from some books on the history of India. In fact while N.S. never wrote and published “History of India” in English, he has four books on the History of India in Tamil. XXVII Indiya Varalaru I and a full fledged
XXVIII **Indiya Varalāru II**  XXIX **Indiya Varalāru III** (1000-1707) and a fullfledged XXX **Indiya Varalāru** covering the entire period from pre-history to the partition of the Madras Presidency (1956).

Since social history of a country is part of its 'socio-economico-political' history and we have earlier mentioned N.S.' small hand book the *Introduction to the Cultural History of India* and its Tamil version, as also the three volume *Tamil Social History* written in English, it will be appropriate to mention N.S.' Comprehensive work in Tamil XXXI on the *Cultural History of India* (Indiyappanpāṭṭu Varalāru). It excludes political history, mentions elaborately the story of the origin and development of Indian culture; in which religion and customary law naturally find a major place.

So including the Tamil rendering just now mentioned he has written 32 books on the political and social aspects of the histories of particular countries and the whole world. But his work on the discipline of history does not stop there. For, not being merely concerned with the writing of the political histories of the world, countries, and regions, he was naturally and fundamentally concerned with the principles forming the art of historical writing. A scientist must know the philosophy of science; so should a historian know the basis of his craft.

XXXII. With this end in view N.S. wrote one of his most learned works *Historiography* (the first edition of the work is meant; it came out in 1973). It carries a preface which speaks a lot about N.S.’ Philosophy of history. There in he has the good grace to acknowledge in detail the work done in this field (though partially) by certain leading historians earlier; e.g. Dr.U.N.Goshal; K.A.N.Sastri; R.C.Majumdar; S.P.Sen etc. N.S’ idea was to write a comprehensive work on the subject and on new lives so far not anticipated by any of his predecessors in the field. He writes the book in five
parts of which the first – part ‘Historical Theory’ is the most important, original and scholarly. The rest is historical, factual, and chronological though the estimates of historical work one finds there are valuable and his own to a great extent. The chapters on ‘definition’, ‘time’ and ‘objectivity’ are extremely important ones in the book. Dr. Derrett, whom one has necessarily to quote often, says in his introduction to the, *H.T and other Essays* ‘he is a craftsman whose back is proof against such winds and whose patriotism in forward and not backward looking’ 59 His daring criticism of such eminent historians like K.A.N. himself shows not his intellectual arrogance but his commitment to the discipline and loyalty to truth as he sees it.

The book is a large one and is in more than 500 pages, and has a bibliography which is though ‘select’ large. Actually he had read or consulted more than a 100 books and numerous journal articles like, I. Berlin, H.E. Barnes, Collingwood, G.R. Elton, D.H.Fischer (a favorite of his), R.Flound, P.Gardiner, Geyl Pieter, Gooch, Langois and Seignobos, Lowtih, Marwick, Plumb, Popper, A.L.Rowse, Shotwell, Smith Page, J.W. Thomson, Trevelyan, G.M. Walsh and a few others, though he pondered long over their writings and wrote down in his book his own conclusions. For sheer quantity of dependable and valuable information well presented in quotable language, this book, among his, has no parallel. I would learn or at least infer in the course of my interviews with him that he himself is proud of this achievement.

---

59. *Vide:* “The winds of change some of them rather chill Norwesterns are blowing in strong gales over the field of historiography somewhat affecting the quality of the crops raised therein. This change of climate does not exactly suit the intellectual health of scholars.....” *Historiography* by N.S. P.457. The reference evidently is to the influence of Marxism on certain influential historians in the North. N.S. very frankly states this anti - Marxist stand here. It is interesting to note that Dr. Derrett has chosen this particular passage for quotation in his learned foreword to *The Hindu Tripod and other Essays.*
and it is significant that the book has been dedicated to his mother another instance of the innate sense of loyalty in him.

Prof. K.A.N. who is not given to unduly praising anything or anyone wrote to N.S. on 2.3.74 as follows: "...... your finely produced work on Historiography. A cursory glance at the contents has shown me what a treasure of precious information it is".

*Historiography* is a comprehensive work and all, world is the stage for his historiographical formulations and evaluations. But he wanted to go beyond that and come nearer home to write an account of the lives and writing of important historians (including Archaeologists) of Tamilnad – ever since the Tamils began writing history in its true form i.e. according to his definition of history. In 1977-78 he wrote a Tamil version (not a translation of the English work) of the subject – *Varalāru Varaiyiyal* – a large work. Its specialities are it is the 1st Tamil Work on the subject and coins a large number of technical terms in Tamil to convey historiographical theoretical propositions.

**XXXIV.** Commissioned and funded by the ICHR, Delhi, he wrote *The Tamilian Historiography* (1988 – January ) in about 250 pages, 9 chapters and an appendix which gives a fairly exhaustive list of historians – native and foreign – who have contributed to the writing of Tamil history – fully or in

---

60. N.S. *Historiography*, P.12. In a review of this work in the Indian Express dt. 26.01.1974, Mr.N.S.Ramaswami states as follows: "It is a work of vast erudition for it takes all history for its province. Every great historian is evaluated. Perhaps the hints on how to prepare doctoral theses are rather out of place in this scholarly work. But there can be only admiration for the work". The emphasis is added to pinpoint the objection: which seems to amount to this that such a scholarly work which senior specialists might peruse need not have been reduced in its altitude by hints for students. The objection is understandable. But the author seems to have been under a minor but unavoidable obligation to meet the requirements of the post graduate course syllabus.
parts. It is an impressive list of 138 historians of varying degrees of eminence.61

There is a 13 page ‘Introductory’ part prefacing the book. It is not only detailed but a summary statement of his view of Tamilian contribution to historiography of this part of country as well as to the whole of the country. Apart from the introduction, the second chapter on ‘A gap in the genius’ discusses the question of lack of historical literature in the Tamil Country in Pre-British times; in fact till the end of the 19th century. Tamilian historiography is just a century and a quarter old though Tamil literature is at least 2300 years old. This chapter tries to discover an answer to this troublesome and somewhat humiliating question. He concedes the expansive genius of the Tamil (like its sister Indian minds elsewhere, not excluding Sanskrit) but qualifies it by positing a huge significant gap in it which is not merely the historical fact of their not having produced histories like those of Thucydides, Tacitus etc; but also a natural and unavoidable deficiency – a significant gap in the remarkable genius of a whole people. He speaks of this not as a mere physical absence of a certain order of literature, but an absence of historical sense in them.62 It is this latter statement63 was raised 26 years earlier by N.S. himself in the seminar on Historiography which he led under

61. It is interesting to note that he has written an account of his own historical writings too in this work (PP.163, 164); but with due modesty he has left ‘a full criticism of his works to other critics’ (P.164).

62. That the Nobel laureate Sir Naipal has expressed a similar view can be seen in a press note in the Hindu dated 13.8.2001. Mr.Naipal singles out R.K.Narayan for lacking a sense of history arguing that his writing ‘hangs in the air’ because of a lack of historical perspective.

63. N.S. Tamilian Historiography, PP.26.ff. He quotes in this context A.B., Keith’s milder statement in his ‘A History of Sanskrit Literature’. P.144: “What is really essential is the fact that, despite the abundance of its literature, history is so miserably represented and that in the whole of the great period of Sanskrit literature there is not one writer who can be seriously regarded as a critical historian”. Here the emphasis on the ‘miserably’ is added, to suggest that there was not only no critical history, but mythologies were created and entitled histories.
the auspices of the Institute of Traditional cultures headed by K.A.N who presided over the seminar. N.S. made it clear then that source materials like colophons, incidental historical references in poems, epigraphs, monastic records and accounts of temple rituals do not constitute 'critical history to which A.B.Keith refers. Naturally Indian scholars or at least many of them—persist in refuting this point. History is the embodiment of criticism— it is not a matter of stringing together events. Even literary criticism, it is now agreed has to be undertaken from the historical angle. Because of this stand and because in his evaluation of historians in chapters III to V this book has become among some readers ‘controversial’. But the chapter VIII which lists the popular disasters which honest and truthful historiography has to face here need the pondering of those who are genuinely interested in promoting a healthy historiographical tradition in Tamilnad.

XXXV Historical Research Methodology:

N.S. craving for delving deep into the secrets of history— i.e. the past of mankind is almost insatiable. His ever active mind goes on creating intellectual problems which he goes on a wandering quest into strange lands which at times yield unheard of truths and reveals to solve unpleasant distortions He was not only a teacher of post graduate students but a guide to researchers. He had guided numerous students to their M.Phil. M.Litt and Ph.D degrees successfully while perusing his own research. When he began guiding research scholars, i.e., while he was even in Madras i.e. from 1964 onwards, he discovered to his dismay that there was no ‘system’ or ‘method’ which could be laid down as inflexible guidelines to those scholars. He knew that methodology has developed into a regular discipline in its own right and

64. Vide. Introduction to N.S' Psychobiography of C.Subramania Bhārati P.4. "Sir Keith Thomas, President, Corpus Christ College, Oxford said: 'I do not see how you can study literature without a historical perspective'. 
advanced thinkers in the field have started talking about 'a methodology for methodologies', for each discipline has its own methodology of constructing a research thesis. Even in those days advanced books on such aspects of the discipline, like R.Floud's "An Introduction to Quantitative Methods for Historians" and W.O.Aydolote's "Quantification in History" had taken their rightful place in that kind of critical literature on history. He wished to introduce his research scholars to those methods and so he added a short last part V to his Historiography– Methodology– Research and Composition.

Now he wrote a book exclusively devoted to Historical Research Methodology (1980) in about 250 pages and in 12 chapters with additional information suffixed to the text as 'A glossary', 'Diacritical marks' 'proof reading', 'common abbreviations of words and books', a standard bibliography. This is a rare book and stands much apart from his other historical works; for it goes to the root of the matter – Historiography. The technique of collecting material, chapterisation, footnoting, providing a bibliography and other appendices to a thesis to be submitted for examination by experts merely constitute the mechanics of research. They are part of the prescribed and usually adopted format for the sake of convenience and uniformity. But N.S. makes a clear distinction between the mechanics and methodology proper. Every discipline has a special character and serves a distinct purpose. To expose the one and serve the other and go deep into the philosophical purpose or epistemology of that branch of knowledge while chapter III of the book specializes in 'historical epistemology' up to chapter VIII this matter is pursued. Chapter X alone deals with the mechanics of research quaintly entitled 'thesis engineering' in this work. It is appropriate though unusual. The first two chapters dealing with 'definition' and 'the question of historical sense' are dealt with in his Historiography and Tamilian Historiography and his views on these matters are consistent.
The last two chapters XI and XII are very special. Chapter XI is freshly introduced to Indian students of historical research. It deals with latest trend in historical research and aspect of which is called Cliometrics\(^\text{65}\), just like Econometrics. But chapter XII is undoubtedly original contribution by N.S. to the discipline of historical research and is entitled cliology\(^\text{66}\). N.S. did not pursue the matter to the end, though he was the pioneer; but he is a pioneer without successors. He has given pictorial representation of 10 ‘trends’ – instances of four of which are given in an appendix to this thesis for exemplification. The book contains a valuable glossary and gives detailed meanings of words usually misunderstood. The insistence on following the advice given by William of Ockham (-1349)\(^\text{67}\) that assumptions introduced to explain a thing must not be multiplied beyond necessity is an extremely valuable piece of advice not only to historical researchers but to all investigators, whatever be the field of enquiry.

In the chapter on Cliometrics, the correspondence between W.O. Ayddote who supported precision, control and exactness to evocative writing and J.K. Hexter who held the opposite view is very useful and revealing and deals with a problem with which most Indian historians are not concerned. There are many who sacrifice both. The problem is one of choosing between ‘the act of historical discovery and that of communicating that discovery’. Though it may finally boil down to a question merely of emphasis, it comes finally to a question of the purpose of history: whether it is the function of a historian to make his reader ‘feel’ or to make him ‘know’. Whatever the emphasis that both are needed and can be acquired and practised as in the case of Thucydides and Gibbon cannot be denied. N.S. observes “this

\(^{65}\) Clio: The muse of history; metrics: quantitative measurement.

\(^{66}\) Logy is from the Greek ‘logia’ – meaning writing. Cliology is the mathematical representation of historical truth gained by experience.

\(^{67}\) N.S. H.R.M.: P.165.
correspondence excellently summarizes the respective view points, for and against quantification applied to historical studies". 68

XXXVI. Meaning of Indian History:

On 19.11.1987 N.S. delivered the first of the Dr. Barpujari Endowment lecture under the auspices of the Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta and later on in 1989 the lecture was in its expanded form published by the Institute itself. The title of the lecture was, ‘The Meaning of Indian History’. The book bears the same title. In the forward to the book which Dr. N.R. Roy, the then Director of the Institute says: “The expounder (of the thesis) Dr. N. Subrahmanian whose mature scholarship is matched by his incisive and bold exposition is sure to help the reader to sharpen and widen his or her interest as well as knowledge. Apart from proclaimed students and teachers of history, readers with general interest will find its perusal a rewarding experience”.

The book is epoch making. It gives a succinct (not brief) analytical account of what the history of India in its totality means. In the history of Hindu India (which never wrote history in the sense it is defined and understood today) the question arose. In this book, the meaning N.S. discovers is the fate (rise, decline, and fall) of the Hindu Dharma. After all the Hindus (whomsoever it may indicate) are the dominant majority in the country (pre-partition India) and they went through this experience and that is the meaning of all the struggles in this country. The political and religious ones were fought to win that war; but the brave attempts had declining fortunes – beginning with the glorious structure, the king being forced to keep it in place in the face of adversity in the name of Islam and now in the third phase totally and helplessly yielding to the western onslaught – to an entirely

68. Ibid: P. 208.
new culture – which at heart the average Hindu had been wishing for but his ascetic dharma kept him away from mutiny. The Hindu first created his dharma, then defended it from the Muslim (which preoccupation made dharma mark time) and now is collapsing before the blandishments of the industrialized modern West. The book is in 14 chapters including a conclusion.

N.S. brings his unprecedented thesis to a close in a cynical vein and says "The great India – like Samson of old, 'eyeless in Gaza, not knowing which way to turn – beguiled everywhere but guided to nowhere stands a monument of indecision like a colossal Hamlet".

"But what is the meaning of Indian History'? It seems it can be epigramised in a single phrase 'the destiny of the Dharma'; but then in a ritual ridden system in which no word or act need have a 'meaning', is it not possible that the entire story also lacks a credible meanings"?

Prof. Marudanayagam of Pondicherry, who reviewed the book, says that the cultural thesis of the book suffers from a 'major or inner contradiction, a serious flaw'; and proceeds to say 'the author repeatedly mentions the gulf between theory and practice in the Hindu way of life, but squarely blames the theory for all the ills of the Hindu Society'. The Hindu society, according to N.S. behaves only as it can under conditions created by the institutions to which its daily life is subject and whenever necessary quotes some theory or other to defend its actions. For there are enough theories in the system to justify even contradictory theories so that such escapes are not difficult at all. Wherein the contradiction in this situation is not clear: this is N.S.' answer to the review.
When it was pointed out to N.S that Prof. Marudanayagam’s review of the book began with the challenging statement that “The M.I.H. by the eminent professor of History Dr. N.S. may not be an epoch – making book, but it is certainly one of the most disturbing ones written on India”, he merely observed that ‘disturbing the Indian mind is itself and epoch – making effort.’

But then the reviewer says openly that in deterring the meaning of Dharma, the author is extremely uncharitable and out to malign it with a vengeance.\(^6^9\) But credit must be given to the reviewer for generously mentioning the good qualities of N.S’ writing in the M.I.H. He says candidly “there is no doubt that it is an extremely well written book. The author’s mastery of world History, Hindu philosophy, Theology, Sociology, English literature, Sanskrit literature finds the full expression in the work. His command over the English language is superb”.

But whatever the reviewer may say, the fact remains, as N.S. will insist that the Darwinian process of creation, fight for survival, survival or extinction of the species for ability or otherwise to successfully meet the challenges of the environment has occurred in the case of the Hindu Dharma; and this cannot be denied. The Hindu – Buddhist period, the Muslim period, and the British period stand respectively for the three stages. During the last period the inherent and dormant Hindu materialist instinct yielded readily to the blandishments of the secular face of science and technology of the Industrial Revolution. The first was, it is surprising to see, the achievement of the majority of a learned section of very ancient foreign invaders – the Aryan Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Then the challenge came from a dominant minority

\(^{69}\) This seems to be extremely uncharitable to N.S. for he only analyses, dissects, diagnoses like a doctor, if the tests reveal malignity, it cannot be the fault of the tester but reveals only the nature of the disease.
(the Muslims) who invaded India 1000 years ago. Then during the two centuries a smaller community of foreign rulers ruling from more than 6000 miles away upset the entire dharmic applecart except for some lower middle class pretensions. This threefold activity does seem to be the most pronounced of all origin, resistance and fall of a cherished way of life. After all there can be other meanings for the History of India. But that this one can also be a very plausible interpretation cannot be doubted. It is worth nothing that in spite of all the arguments that had gone before, the author himself ends his essay in a doubtful mood.

We have earlier referred to how N.S. was a consultant on matters pertaining to history and how in 1977 – 78 he was consulted by the Ministry of Education, Union Government of India on the matter of prescribing text books. He was a consultant by foreign authorities too on two different matters. One was the enquiry whether certain articles were to be published in international journals. Foreign universities used to consult him regarding promotion of junior scholars to senior positions. In such cases his recommendation was always affirmative.

A reputed publishing firm in Madras asked him in March 1965 to write a paper on the feasibility of writing History books in Tamil or translating foreign classics into Tamil. He wrote a paper encouraging the proposal and agreeing to the possibility but subject to the condition that the Tamil author of history books 1) ought to be well versed in writing good Tamil (not merely correct Tamil) and also that he 2) ought to know universal

70. Dr.H.D. Harootanian’s reference regarding an article to be published in the Journal of Asian Studies on 21.11.1974 is an instance in point.
71. The Colombo University’s reference regarding the promotion of Dr. Kailasapathy is an example: 15.6.1971.
history well. That paper is now included as the first in the bunch of Tamil critical essays "Tamilti Varalāṟṟu Ilakkiya Chiṅtaihaigal" (1990). He had already spoken on translating English Historical classics into Tamil on 30.12.1962 in the Memorial Hall, Madras, Parktown. So he has all along been concerned about the qualifications needed for aspirants to translations of foreign classics. Thus grew his interest in translations as such. He translated a few verses of the Paripāḍal as models, the political texts in the Tolkāppiyam and Paḷamoli (400) and the whole of the Arattupāḷ of Tirukkuṟaḷ. He wrote a long essay on the subject of 'Translations' in general.

He believed, as recommended by Lord Macaulay in his Education Minute (1829), in writing original works in history in Tamil rather than in badly translating good classics. His first part of Indiya Varalāṟṟu published in 1964 by the NCBH was intended to be a model: and a discerning Government recognised and awarded a prize to it.

XXXVII. Ingilându Varalāṟṟu:

It was in 1960 January. Only about a month earlier N.S. had joined the Dept. at the University. Mr.K.K. Pillay, Prof and H.O.D. of History then called and told him that he (Pillay had received a commission from the Govt. of Madras that he may write a comprehensive History of England to the end of reign of Elizabeth I and that he would be receiving a reasonable remuneration for it. But then he added saying that N.S. should write it on his behalf and handover the ms. within three months i.e. before the end of April 1960. The idea however was that the book would stand in Pillay's name but the working of it was to be done by N.S. N.S. agreed and did the work.

73. This was well known to the Proprietor and the Manager of the Appar Achchagam, Broadway, Madras, which printed the book. The very Tamil style in which the book is written gives the truth away.
assigned to him by his professional boss. This is generally speaking contrary to his character and principles which had a large family to maintain.

This book called Ingilându Varalâru stands in K.K. Pillay’s name; but written by N.S. in 416 pages has dynastic lists, genealogical tables, chronology, bibliography and an index besides a few useful maps in the text.

XXXVIII. In 1965 the SLBT suggested that Pillay should write an adaptation in Tamil of James Cameron’s the African Revolution. Pillay offered to N.S. the same old terms as in the case of the History of England, but N.S. sternly refused; for he must have thought that selling one’s soul more than once was too much; and so N.S. did it all by himself and the product was Āpppirikkā (Africa) (1965) in 240 pages. It is in 26 chapters dealing with different parts of Africa; it has a few maps a ten page preface, a geographical information guide at the end besides a few maps. The book was translated into the three other Dravidian languages too. Africa is an example of the range which N.S.’ historical writing could reach.

N.S. published a number of research papers relating to various humanist subjects in at least 42 journals from A.M. Jain College journal to Journal of Tamil studies, Madras, through many memorial volumes and learned periodicals like the Thought, Tamil culture, Quest, J.I.H., Annals of Oriental Research etc.,

74. Who could make or mar N.S.’ professional future.