CREATIVE WRITING AND GENERAL CRITICISM
N.S. has to be assessed differently from all other historians, Indian or even foreign. He is rather unique. He wrote and taught not only history professionally but also literature (privately). He is a radical humanist; this does not mean he has any revolutionary or rebellious tendencies. He insists on obedience to law. Lawbreakers, even in the best of causes, are anathema to him as he makes it plain in his study of C.S. Bhārati. If law is bad it must be changed and not disobeyed while it is on the statute book. He is mild in his speech and manners by temperament, but in his views, writings, teachings and public lectures he held that the present world needed considerable change. This is his radical humanism. So he was once called quite aptly 'a timid revolutionary'. This should not mean that he even loses sight of the necessity to be objective up to the Rankean level. He is as insistent on the fairness of the form as the correctness of the content. He is an innovator but not a destroyer of tradition when the latter does no harm but adds charm.

He is just an agnostic, and to him all so-called 'religious' problems are not theological but historical. All public quarrels – whatever be the motivation, are law and order problems to him. If a man cannot compromise or reconcile, argue or reason, he is a totalitarian and can be a tyrant. The final aim of all governance – is the happiness of the average (especially the weaker) men, women and children – important in the reverse order. It is with these views in the back of his mind that he writes his histories, poems, criticisms, stories; and behaves thus even in private life. He knows the 'educational system,' provides only 'information' and not 'education'; the real aim should be to make people wise and be good, and not merely be informed and able to do things. N.S. judges all rulers by the simple rule of whether they make the lives of the people, entrusted to them, happy. The form of government and verbal clichés like democracy, secularism (wrongly defined)
etc. is of little use. Empowering a person before teaching him how to use that power wisely is positive disservice not only to the empowered but much more so to their victims.

To N.S., history has to be critically and not casually studied, for it is the mother of all disciplines. Absence of critical faculty among the ruled (like in the case of readers) is more dangerous than the presence of dogmatism on the part of the rulers (like in the case of writers). The democratic practice of voting in elections and persons emerging out of the ballot boxes to go to legislative bodies is only part of the democratic mechanics. Its spirit consists in everyone in society feeling the sense of equality and fraternity and attaching the greatest value to personal liberty. Those are seen in all his writings; and Mr.Herring summarized him as ‘one who calls a spade a spade’ — this requires spiritual courage of a rare order. Self-interest stands between character and its expression through institutions. He is not an anarchist but a perpetual anti-establishmentarian and says that — the people, having elected their government in a democracy must sit in the opposition.

History has lessons to teach, but there are few learners. It warns against all kinds of fanaticism and draws the attention of the careful student to the virtues of liberalism — which is the ‘golden’ moderation. But advice, as N.S. has pointed out on p.392 of Envalkkai Varalāru, has always been futile according to his experience. For self-interest is more important and powerful than the virtues which one can teach. ‘Sandford and Merton’1 are in perpetual conflict in the soul of man as Bertrand Russell pointed out explaining the philosophy of Henri Bergson.2 These were the major impulses of this highly cultivated historian.

1. When N.S. was only 11 or 12 years old, he had read Thomas Day’s Sandford and Merton and could therefore easily see what Russell was referring to.
2. Russell, B. History of Western Philosophy.
PART I

1. Kuttikkatturaigal:

Though N.S. began with a short story the ('Wood Cutter':) when very young (1926), his first major ambitious literary work was the Kuttikkatturaigal, especially designed to supply a serious want in Indian literature. That was the non-serious type of informal essay – usually short – which Dr. Johnson called, 'a loose sally of the mind; an irregular, indigested piece; not a regular and orderly composition'. There are all kinds of short prose writings in Sanskrit in the form of stories and fables, as in the Paññchatamrā; but the short informal essay, which the author wrote as the mood led him, but always keeping an eye on his experience and factual reality was almost as absent as the modern (i.e. post 17th century) English novel itself. No one attempted it; it seems the idea never struck anyone. N.S. was the first to try his hand at this kind of composition. The short skits one comes across in weekend journals full of jokes are not the 'essay' proper. To fill this gap, therefore, N.S. wrote the Kuttikkatturaigal in 1949-50 mostly to find occupation for companionless evenings and to get over the tedium of the boring routine work he has been doing in the office. All the essays, originally sixteen (but later four more were added) dealt with subjects like the village temple, the village schoolmaster, on walking, the crow, the bug and so on. The 'bug' was so good that a colleague of N.S. in the AMJC offered to translate it into English and send it to the Times of India (the Illustrated Weekly) for publication. But the idea somehow never came through.

Once when a friend of his in Pollachi tried to sell a few copies of this book to his colleagues in his native town of Sinnamanur (then Madurai

3. Quoted by J.H. Lobban in his introduction to English Essays, P.1. The western critics make a distinction even between Bacon and E.V.Lucas or J.B.Priestley and Montaigne and Charles Lamb.
District) he could not sell even one copy of the essays for the lower standard
teachers there objected to the essay on the village schoolmaster and refused to
buy the book. They did not have the sense of humour needed to enjoy a joke
at one’s own expense or to recognize the truth and correct themselves. N.S.
once bought a copy of this, his own book, from a Triplicane second hand
pavement bookseller for four annas. The book has been revised and as stated
above, enlarged and is not likely to be published again. But this bold and
successful experiment requires a kind of temperament to write and to read, the
latter of which in particular is singularly absent among the local readership.
In all probability, the book may go into the limbo. In its time (1950), just
more than half a century ago the book was very well reviewed in the local and
Sri Lankan and Malaysian Tamil press.

2. Children’s books:

Books written for children are not to be despised, nor are they very
easy to write. Some children’s books⁴ have become classics. Well and
correctly written books on interesting subjects are equally good for adults too;
e.g. children as well as adults can read *Sandford and Merton* and *Alice in
Wonderland*. The eternally classic lines ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star! How I
wonder what you are!’ by Ann and Jane Taylor are classic; and to children
they are as valuable as any two lines in Homer or Shakespeare. Adults, who
are not devoid of the imagination very special to children, can enjoy and
benefit by them. N.S wrote simple error-free readable Tamil non-detailed
textbooks for higher-class students in secondary schools. This work began in
1951. Being a scholar who believed in communicating history through
anecdotes and biographies he wrote his first small children’s book in

⁴. Here the expression does not refer to the kind of verses and prose passages written fashionably
for children without reference to their progress in school studies and called ‘Kulandai
Ilakkyam’.
November 1951, which fetched a paltry sum of Rs.30/. The bread it earned, if sliced up among the eight people at home (plus an unavoidable but beloved neighboring boy) would be very slim indeed. It tells the story of 15 Tamil poets. Then came seven more such books before 1961 when he published a short memoir of Sir M. Visveswarayya. He wrote a social studies book ‘You and Society’ and prepared an anthology of Tamil verses and prose pieces (Tamilpuñjolai) for the IX standard pupils in 1961. He wrote a novelette on ChandraGupta (the Mauryan) (124 pp) based on historical facts slightly helped by romantic imagination (1960). Very late, i.e. 30 years later in 1990 he wrote a similar work. Jean Val Jean (140 PP), an abridged version of Victor Hugo’s Les Miserables, a book he loves so much that he calls it the Bible in novel form. He wrote an abridged adaptation of R.L. Stevenson’s Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as Arattin Verri. He wrote four books on elementary grammar, syntax, prose compositions, analysis, letter writing, précis-writing etc. for elementary school students, between 1958 and 1960 in a graded manner and called them Tamil Molippayirchi (I to IV). So it was all between 1951 and 1960 (but for Jean Val Jean) that he wrote his children’s books. He had however begun writing more serious books already and wrote classics from 1950 onwards, beginning with the life of V.G. Suryanarayana Sastriar; then came the edition of Ānandaraṅgan Kovai and the Man and his world, Elements of Politics, Modern Governments, Revision of R.N. Grilchrist’s Modern Governments and an introduction to the Cultural History of India in English and in Tamil for the B.A. – minor-students.

With the publication of the Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index (1965) and the Śaṅgam Polity in 1966, N.S.’ life as a writer took an upward turn till it reached levels already indicated.
3. Creative Writing:

Of all scholars it is the historian whose scholarly equipment, knowledge of facts, imagination as well as intuition have to be most comprehensive; and N.S' were as comprehensive as could never have been possible, in the circumstances of his life. The earlier chapters of this thesis have dealt with his contribution to historical studies and allied subjects. Now we shall examine his contribution to English and to Tamil literatures in their various aspects. Being himself a scholar of varied talents N.S. expected his readers to have the necessary educational background needed to read his more difficult and more innovative bold stuff. But he miscalculated.

4. Prose

We shall first deal with his creative works5 in general making only a few general observations. Our treatment of this aspect of N.S.' achievements will be in two parts. 1.about his critics; 2.about what this thesis concludes about those creative literary works. The chief source of critical judgement of his English creative works, particularly the Pandora's Box and to a lesser extent the Echoes  the Festschrift Prof.N.Subrahmanian – the man and his work. The criticisms found there are various and curious, interesting and revealing. There has been misunderstanding as well as misrepresentation; the former is usually the product of either lack of wide scholarship or ignorance of the author’s psychology; and the latter of unknown origin. But N.S. said that a writer is judged by his best work and not his least worthy ones. It must be remembered also that he was not a professional litterateur, but a scholar who brings the weight of his enormous scholarship to bear on his creative

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5. What in Tamil many contemporary writers call ‘இயற்கைத் தகவல்’ N.S. invariably calls ‘சுருக்கம்’ which he considers linguistically more accurate because சுருக்கம் is the word which the ancients have preferred for example ‘சுருக்கத்தைச்’ etc.
literary efforts. But still his contribution to creative literature has been very considerable and of enviably high standard, and creative in a true sense. How he found time and the mood for these efforts is unknown except to himself and on some matters, he is calculatedly reticent.

He has written literary material in English as well as in Tamil; both have come under the critics' axe and glare and earned cheering in some cases and jeering in a few others. We have full list of his creative works in English and in Tamil: 1. *Pandora’s Box, Prose*, PP. 145; 2. *Echoes from the Heart* (poems), pp. 90; 3. *Epic Musings*, pp. 143; 4. *The Psychobiography of C.Subramania Bhārati*, pp. 221. 5. *His autobiography in Tamil – En Vālkai Varalāru*, PP. 436; 6. The yet unpublished work *Evening of my life* (87 ms.pp); 7. *Random Thoughts* (51 pp).

We shall deal only with a few important sections of these works and deal with just a few important critics to approve or to correct. Dr. Prema Nandakumar wrote: “There is such a fine spontaneity about your writing in English. It covers trailing, clouds of glory from the past, whether it is Greek mythology or a Brahmin joint family, what binds your writing together is dark laughter... The long story ‘the Missing One’ made me very sad. The whole writing seemed to be fun...........but the tragedy at the close makes it terrible. The ‘Doom of the Blue Beards’ is pure Edgor Allan Poe. And I enjoyed

6. What the calculation is cannot even be guessed, though some critics have walked into places which angels fear to tread.

7. Which is not likely to be published at all, but to which N.S. kindly gave me access. The incidents mentioned there explain his attitude to life—which some critics who have had no access to these occurrences, call ‘gloomy’ ‘melancholy’ etc.

8. 101 Random Thoughts are suffixed to the *Pandora’s Box*, recently his *Random Thoughts* are published (2004). ‘The Catherine Wheel’ has been throwing off sparks which will sparkle so long as N.S. is capable of ‘thought’ – a process from which he is never free.
meditating over your ‘Random thoughts’. Especially the one about “the Pseudo – intellectual who carries native superstitions in foreign capsules”.

The net impression is that while Mrs. Thailambal’s extensive and critical essay boils down to debunking N.S.’ literary effort. Mrs. P. Nanadakumar’s concentrates on the virtues of a non-English man being steeped in such western tradition of writing as to remind the reader of Shakespeare and E.A. Poe. But it must be remembered that N.S. does better than many more famous and well-advertised Indian contributors to English literature. Currently he is not considered for inclusion in that oft-repeated list. Mrs. P. Thailambal also has written on N.S.’ English prose works: But the tone of her comments is essentially adverse though compliments are strewn here and there to sweeten the bitter pill. We shall consider only three difficulties she faces in assessing N.S. who is admittedly difficult to assess. The first point is her objection to his treatment of ‘a mother’s love to her children as a biological provision and nature’s necessity’, which is not to be romanticised as people often (why almost always) do. This is straightaway disproved by the innumerable cases of female infanticide perpetrated by the very mother⁹. The second objection is that N.S’ account is gloomy. It is not entirely true. The book is only completely free from frivolousness, cheap jokes and refusing to be easily satisfied with petty achievements. He will not laugh or break into a guffaw’ (the critic’s phrase) (p. 196) because as he has said in one of his finest random thoughts, when he remembers the tears of the miserable, his laughter dies out. Somebody laughing while others are weeping is the privilege of the affluent but feelingless middle class, according to N.S. whom I addressed on this point specifically. Thirdly her patriotism is offended by

⁹. In the *Brothers Karamazov* Dostoevsky gives a two page (page 286 and 287 of *Brothers Karamazov*, Modern Library ed. 1950) account of mothers’ horrendous cruelty to their own children. Parents are not necessarily the best lovers of their children. Eppie in Silas Marner and Karna in the *Mahabharata* are enough epic examples.
N.S.' admiration for English institutions and character noted for punctuality etc. a society which practises untouchability and upholds caste is rather difficult to approve of. These views personally expressed by N.S. seem to be worth pondering.

5. Poems

N.S.'small book of poems 'Echoes from the Heart' has been specially studied with great skill and sympathy by Mrs.P.Nandakumar who speaks of "The Shakespearean touch in the poems to Dora in Echoes from the Heart; and I can also sense a pain in many of the poems: The saddest thoughts do provide a sweet timber of its own to poetry". This book consists of six main parts: 1.A word to the reader in which the poet presents a scene alleged to involve the 'author' and 'Dora' (whoever was that blessed woman?) and incidentally gives the reason for the poetical work. 2.The second part gives the background for the work. 3.The third is a dedication, which continues the farce and verismimilitude and introduces an imaginary child - a messenger from the author's 'Dora'. 4. Two categories of poems; part one is social criticism, which is part of N.S.' intellectual spiritual being: it begins with a terrific attack on 'Sati' (72 lines) - it is a prosopopoeia, a ghost communicating to a living man its woes when it lived.

A few lines will show the author's poetic talent as well as of his sense of righteousness.

"I come from the world of murdered souls For whom no saving church bell tolls –

I come from the world of wand'ring ghosts Driven from the world that brides ever roasts"

10. N.S. Man and his work: P.195 the use of the word 'scribbled' in connection with the writings of a man like N.S. is to say the least uncharitable.
"My husband was a body dead
The funeral pyre my bridal bed"

"I loved to live but was forced to die
But none there was to feel or sigh"

"Cursed be the men and land
That burns the wife with dead husband"

"The vanished ghost had left behind
An agony in my aching mind"

They are therefore collectively called 'short but not sweet poems' (28 verses); the other part is 'poems to Dora – directly from the heart' (49 verses). The third part of the poetical work consists of 'Prose poems to Dora'11. So there are 88 pieces in verse in all. They were written at different times in his life. Such poems need a certain mood for their expression. In the midst of the most varied actions and reactions in life, that the author should have so often got that mood is remarkable. But in any case this book of poems raises a few points, which need some thought and expression. The former is inevitable to any intelligent reader but the latter is very elusive.

The “Poems to Dora” are either the expression of extremely sad, unforgettable real experience in life or ‘a very clever attempt to make the reader believe this which after all is pure fantasy.’ Many however seem to believe that Dora was a living person, the author’s one time love. The author’s craft is complete, that the suspicion can easily arise. For Dante’s Beatrice and Burn’s Mary and Sir Philip Sydney’s Stella were not imaginary. Shakespeare’s sonnets do suggest a great-unknown role to that ‘dark lady’. Why then should Dora not have existed in flesh and blood? The melancholy, which Mrs. Thailambal discovers in N.S. might have been the product of the undiscovered role that Dora played in his life. But one imagines that one

knows N.S' biodata in such detail that there is no way of accommodating a Dora in it. But for all this could there have been a Dora? But certainly there is no way of finding her out if she ever had existed except in the remarkably creative intellect of N.S.

Those who knew of N.S. as a very coldly logically rational being could never suspect this aspect of his life, if there was such an aspect. Further, even if it were only the product of imagination, it was fantastic that the author of the *Hindu Tripod* could also write verses Nos. 66 and 72 of the Echoes. Dr. Herring, who was familiar with such things as ‘The phenomenon of change’, could not imagine the odd possibility of N.S. authoring the *Echoes*; and he wrote: “These poems revealed to me a hitherto completely unknown quality of your work, a lyrical, sentimental, emotional element which is not incompatible with the principles and findings of the scholar.”

N.S. indulged in another kind of imaginative writing – i.e. a new interpretation of the characters of the two great – Hindu Epics: *The Vālmiki Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*.

6. The Epic Musings:

As N.S. says in his preface to the work, what he has done here is to deprive the apotheosised personalities in these epics of their celestial status to reduce them to purely human proportions and then study their characters i.e. without being impeded by the insurmountable obstacles offered by the deifications. This is something, which the orthodox will not approve of. But N.S. the born literary experimenter could not escape doing this. He has done this with extraordinary craft – psychological as well as literary. 27 subjects have been discussed. ‘Karṇa’ in the series takes the cake so far as literary style is concerned. It surpasses the English of any known Indian writer of that language. ‘Kunti’ reveals woman’s character at its rawest. The last essay on ‘a

question of philosophy’ is an unanswerable philosophical question. The clear answer is there; but very few would dare to spell it out. It is a question of reason and logic – things in which N.S. delights.

It is not a question of Vyāsa being right or wrong; but one of reason vs. faith, the possible vs. the impossible, logic vs. illogic. He believes more in Aristotle’s emphatic statement that what has been done can never be undone – even by God! Even those who object to the other essays in the Epic Musings must ponder this problem of philosophy.

N.S. has written quite a large quantity of creative writing in Tamil. He has written poems, a novelette, fifty short stories, and a number of dialogues and plays: apart from his editions of classic poetry with commentaries and long historical prefaces and very critical essays in five volumes one of which is yet to be published. His literary product in both the languages put together might have been enough for any literary honour and award internationally and nationally. He has explained that he has missed both in two or three of his essays in the yet unpublished ‘Evening of my life’.

PART II

1. His Tamil Poems:

In addition to writing poems in English, N.S. wrote Tamil poems too. Two slim volumes: 1.Pāmālai and 2.Gāndhi Pillai Tamil, have been

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13. N.S. has 2399 lines of Tamil poetry and 1452 lines of English verses and 16 pages of prose poems to his credit. The former in his Pāmālai and the latter in the Echoes.
14. On 5.3.86 T.A. Srinivasan of the Madurai edition of the Indian Express reviewed the Pāmālai very completely and with a full understanding of and sympathy for the poet; and mentions the long critical introduction and the different sections of the collection. But it is not a criticism of the Tamil poetry of N.S. Instances like the beautiful verse 33 in the poem ‘Uḻūṟai’ or verse 2 in Kōkilam on p.90 have not been mentioned as extraordinary pieces of poetic imagination far exceeding the quality of the best among the most advertised of Tamil poets of the 20th century. The review deals more with the most advertised introduction than with the poems themselves.
published. But he has collected all his Tamil poems in a single volume of nearly 260 ms. But that includes many new poems and awaits publication. His poems are in the traditional classical style, though simple in diction; A.S.Gnanasambandan who released the Pillai Tamil read through it word by word and expressed uninhibited wonder at the author’s ability to string poetic phrases together and create a remarkable impression.

On the basis of his collected Tamil poetical works Na.Śu.Vin Kavithaigal (Na.Śu.Vin Kavithaigal) we have ten varieties of poems. 1. Nature 2. Epics 3. The country 4. Mystery 5. Invocatory verses 6. Ethical advice 7. Tamil 8. Love 9. Gandhi 10. Miscellaneous - preceded by a long learned preface dealing with the seminal ‘theme’ of the distinction between mere versification and true poetry; he expresses strong disapproval in the focus of New Tamil (mere flat prose called poetry by a privilege which these poets have conferred on themselves) and also that most of the verses in the Kural are mere versified proverb and not poetry – there is little wonder this has irritated the orthodox no-changers. To his collection the great Tamil scholar Dr.Tamilannal has provided a learned and appreciative introduction. The entire N.S.’ poetry is traditional in format but often modern and even revolutionary and original in content. He has finally translated in verse two short poems by Chaucer and Defoe respectively. There is pathos, humour, epic grandeur, light composition, heavy sarcasm and a bit of autobiography and so on in his Tamil poems. The best of his pieces, the connoisseur can easily find out is of course the very abridged version in just 84 verses the story of Helen (Elan Kathai). The poetic imaginative forms and the mastery of the poetic diction are at their best in that piece. The Gāndhi Pillai Tamil.

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15. The poems are Chaucer’s ‘The Compleynt of Chaucer to his purse’ (as Paṇamār Pai) and a part of Defoe’s ‘The True Born English Man’ (Saitan’s school).
purposely shortened to 89 verses instead of the conventional 101 is a class by itself. This collection entitles N.S. to be considered one of the leading conventional (but-dealing with unusual topics) poets of the 20th century.

In his extensive preface to his Na.Šu. Vin Kavithaigal, he objects to the Pudukkavithai (the new 'poetry'), which is popular now because according to N.S. this kind of writing, “falsely called poetry”- I am quoting N.S. – “lacks ordained grammar, as well as grace, rhyme and rhythm. The absence of rhyme does not really matter provided there is rhythm as in the Paradise Lost or in the many Vaṟjippa of ancient Tamil. Some journalistically styled statements are put in disconnected Tamil prose, printed to look like verse – and this is new poetry. What then is the difference between lowest prose properly written and ‘prose run mad calling itself poetry’? He is uncompromising in this matter. When told that Pudukkavidai is the most popular form of poetry now, he says, ‘its very popularity makes its quality suspicious’ – a clearly Carlylean touch.

N.S.' contribution to the Kural and to the Šilappadikāram is very special and worth mention. He has 1.prepared his Kural Concordance (English) and 2.translated into English the Arattuppāl of the Kural (English) and has written the yet unpublished work Tirukkural Kaṭṭuraigal (Tamil). The last mentioned work is noteworthy for its originality of thought and the courage he could summon to point to certain inner contradictions in the text itself and style the book 'proverbial literature'; and above all to have compared the Kural with Tupper's Moral Philosophy.17

16. This again shows N.S.' innate tendency to be different from the normal.
17. M.F.Tupper (1810-1889) wrote his Moral Philosophy, which was temporarily extremely popular, but today remains unknown. This comparison is devastating.
2. Biographies and Autobiographies.

These two literary forms are of a very special and related nature. In pre-Islamic Indian literature this kind of writing is very rare. Earlier than the modern type of biographies, the *Pulavar Purāṇam* of Daṇḍapāṇi Swāmigal and the *Vinōda Rasa Mañjari* of Veerasāmi Chettīār, both of the middle 19th century had appeared. But they did not follow any scientific principle of biographical writing but could be called some sort of literary gossip, in verse or in prose. Even diaries were not maintained before the days of Anandarangam Pillai, late 18th century; a habit which his family got from the Muslims or the Europeans. N.S. not only maintained diaries but wrote biographies and autobiographies (both in English and in Tamil). This kind of writing is an art practiced differently in different countries by different persons. They range from Plutarch to Morley and Seutonius to Boswell, from Rousseau, Gibbon, Mill, Edward VIII and Conan Doyle. But of all of them Boswell and Mill take the cake. N.S. has the natural instinct of a historian for gathering, maintaining and scrutinising family records, preparing family genealogies and trying to discover the origins of things. This of course makes him swim against the current.

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18. Sardonically one might even compare them with ‘murder’ and ‘suicide’ respectively or better still ‘critical observation’ and ‘introspection’ – “It is a hard and nice subject for a man to write of himself. It grates his own heart to say anything of disparagement and the reader’s ears to hear anything of, praise from him”. Abraham Cowley: *Of Myself*.

19. Some rare exception being Asvaghosa’s *Buddha Charita* and Bana’s *Harsha Charita*. But autobiographies were never written. One does not know if it indicates lack of interest in introspection and its recording.

20. He destroyed his diaries after he wrote his *En Vaikkai Varatārū*.

21. In this connection Dr. Herring (formerly Director, Max Muller Bhavan, Madras) wrote on 8.4.93, quoting the following lines of the Polish Satirist Stanisław Jerzylec:

“When one wants to reach the source of rivers
One must swim against the current”. 
In 1950 N.S. wrote the biography of V.G. Suryanarayana Sastriar (who was Head Tamil Pandit, Madras Christian College from 1893 to 1903 when he died). He had enough information from his father and from other sources about V.G.S. The book is in 168 pages. The book is entitled Vi.Kō.Śuryanārayana Sāstriār (1870 – 1903) and is in Tamil. The book was prescribed as a textbook for the intermediate students of the Madras University (1956). It is in 10 chapters and deals with his public and domestic life and lays stress on the school of Tamil studies he created consisting of very promising Tamil students and was particularly interested in dramatic literature. He was one of those who innovated without violating or condemning tradition. His Tanippāsuratogai had the distinction of being translated into English in verse by G.U. Pope of Oxford.

In 1976 N.S. wrote a 70 page biography in Tamil of his father and prefixed it to his edition of his father’s collected poetical works Na.Balarāma Aiyarin Vālkkai Varalarum Šeyyul togaiyum.

It was in 1993 when he was past 78 that he wrote his autobiography in Tamil-En vālkkai Varalaru – subtitled Iru vēru ulagathiyarkai (the nature of the two different worlds); i.e. the one between 1916 when he was born and 1950 when he left Government service; and the other the period thereafter. The vast difference in various walks of life he saw between the two has been

22. We shall give just a few examples: 1. Prof.S.Ambirajan (25.7.1994)
   "For me the book is a great learning experience. Your pen portraits are magnificent. It is a fascinating picture of what I would call a vanishing civilization". 2. Mr.M.Gandhi, Prof.of English (Rtd), Suchindram (23.9.1995): ‘Your En Vālkkai Varalaru reminds me of Shelley’s famous line “I bleed”. I find a lot of radiation of your injured soul treated by the interaction of men and matters… The forceful writing often lends new charm and serious visions. At the end of the book you begin to appear like a saint…a thought provoking book”. 3. Dr.Prema Nanda Kumar: “In spite of the invaders from abroad and the little man at home, Mother India continues to be rich because of the presence of incorruptible people like you”.

admirably brought out in this book in which his father is as much a hero as himself. This work is in 436 PP. written in simple but correct Tamil has become a famous and favourite autobiography in Tamil. The book though in simple Tamil prose easily understood even by neo-literates, avoids journalesse, which most (even highly educated people) find it difficult to do these days. The knowledgeable Kerala University Tamil Faculty prescribed it as a textbook for its postgraduate students. An important characteristic of the work is that it avoids, while recapitulating the past, mentioning those who hampered his progress in life; another is, it is full of wise saws and moral instances; it avoids much reference to his domestic life and details about the members of his family. Many have commented on this last point but his invariable response is that the book is intended only as an instrument to communicate to the reader how he by his personal effort overcame many obstacles and came up in life and not fault those who harmed him or mention those who played important roles in the progress of his public academic life and his personal intellectual achievements. In the festschrift Prof. N.S. The man and his work, more than one contributor has reviewed the work, each in his or her own way. N.S. himself considered this book important enough to deserve the following observations of his: 1. “Why did I write this autobiography? The reason is simple: I am a great believer in the wisdom of Socrates who said that an unexamined life is not worth living. So I examined my life and the result is this book”. 2. “An autobiography of a really unknown Indian - not calling himself that out of modesty, real or feigned but of sheer

23. The two different worlds: he borrows the Tamil phrase from the Tirukkaal (374), but gives it a different meaning. Many other authors have also thought and spoken of two different worlds.

1. There are only two castes - the givers (the charitable ones) and the takers (the beggars) - Auvai; 2. Those who own libraries and those who read books - Naladiyar; 3. The two nations the rich and the poor - Sybil (Disraeli); 4. The exploiting capitalists and the exploited labour (Marx); 5. the borrower and the lender of books (Charles Lamb); and so on. N.S. himself delivered a lecture in the Madurai Rotary Club on the two nations: the competent and the incompetent.
fact". The emphasis on 'my' shows that he was not concerned with his family's contribution to his life.

The Tamil autobiography ends with 1993 when that book was published. A decade has gone by since then and much 'bitter' (according to N.S.) water has flowed under all the bridges he had to cross. He, then determined to write a few things which he deliberately held back in his Tamil autobiography; and add some more material which makes it a collection of 26 episodes, all written in English: he calls it the 'Evening of my life' and he imagines and portrays the setting sun. It remains unpublished. It reveals material, which goes a long way to explain what made his life what it is.

Of all the biographies and autobiographies he has written, the most important, brilliantly written and quite controversial, his Psychobiography of C.Subramania Bhārati stands foremost. One can understand the embarrassment it has caused to the Bharatiphils for it systematically, rationally, historically exposes the so-far carefully hidden many aspects of that nationalist poet. Some call it controversial. He admits it is off the track and purposely so. For the study is aided by the critical tool - psychoanalysis and his interpretation of the Kuyil Pāṭṭu is original and the product of psychoanalysis. N.S. takes the adverse criticism of this work in his stride; and caustically remarks 'when cobwebs are removed, spiders do protest'. N.S. who delights in dedicating his works to some one or other - and those dedications if collected will make a bunch of extraordinary reading – has not dedicated this work to anyone.

As in the case of his Tamil autobiography he has some sound basic reasons why he should have chosen C.Subramania Bhārati as the subject matter for his psychoanalytical study of a public figure. We shall mention a few: 1.N. S. is an opponent of the principle of national sovereignty and
recommends a single world government and total elimination of all concerned with what is called 'defence'. 2.N.S. is against every kind of violence and will not permit it even in the name of patriotism; 3.N.S. is a classicist and opposes romanticism in art and letters; 4.N.S. is a lover of English language and literature; 5.N.S. is a moderate liberal and is against extremist politics; in fact extremism in anything; and so on. C.Subramaniya Bhārati holds exactly opposite views in regard to all those matters. Hence N.S. wished to study him, at the very root of the subconscious that made C.S.Bhārati what he was. This is not expressly stated in his work; but a careful reader can see through the work the glimmerings of these fundamental differences. So his adverse critics confirm him as a controversialist.

N.S. is in addition to all that has been said above, a short story writer, a writer of a novelette, a playwright and a creative critic.

3. A novelette

The novelette is historical and relates to Chandragupta Maurya’s ascension to power in Magadha with the help of Chanakya a Brahmin, overthrowing the Kshatriya Nanda. Chandragupta’s encounter with Alexander the Great is perhaps the best part of the story and brings out the character of both clearly; and reveals the role the Brahmin played in the overthrow of the Kshatriya. N.S. never had the time, or perhaps the inclination to write a full-fledged novel. This novelette is one of the facts proving that history permeates all the writings of N.S. one way or the other.

4. The short stories

The ancients knew the short story in its primitive form; and the little tales they told were ‘fables’ like Aesop’s and Grimm’s or the Pañchatantra sub stories. They were not necessarily intended to convey any moral but
clever and gifted men could draw or imagine moral lessons in them. The short story today however is rather different. It is both, normally (but necessarily) short in length and a story too. It is supposed that E.A. Poe is the father of the modern short story. Even those who do not follow his pattern of writing make this claim. In Tamilnad the short stories developed into a longer allegorical theme was first attempted by Constantine Beschi (known in Tamil as 'Viramā Munivar) in his (Guru Noodle) – Paramārta Guru Kadai. In the 90s of the 19th century Pandit Natesa Sastri wrote his detective short stories in his the detective Dānavan; more than a decade later A.Madhaviah wrote his Kusikar short stories but they were in English. In 1924 they were translated into Tamil as Kuśikar kuṭṭikkadaigal. In the same year appeared V.V.Subramania Aiyar’s short stories one of which was the story supposedly narrated by a tree.

Then the journal Manikkodi of the late 20s of the last century specialized in introducing western styles of literature and providing them with a grammar and a definition given by the contributors of that journal.

These men set the pace of the future Tamil short story writers. Most of them first appeared in weekend journals and then were put together and published as volumes. N.S. was a short story writer for his constantly active mind was inventing stories and he wrote them in English as well as in Tamil. In English he wrote just three short stories: 1. The Doom of the Blue Beards, which reminds Dr. Prema Nandakumar of the influence of E.A. Poe; 2. 'The Missing One' is perhaps the most tragic of the English short stories he has written. It is so acknowledged by competent critics; 24 3. 'Oh! Those Hands' is a special creation of N.S. It was kind a of maniac who mistook his own hands for those of others and strangled himself a rather strange subject involving psychology of a curious nature. These three short stories and the Greek

24. "The long story 'the Missing One' made me very sad. The whole writing seemed to be fun.... But the tragedy at the close makes it terrible": Prema Nandakumar in her letter dt. 22.9.93.
Tragedy - a Greek mythological play are enough to entitle N.S. to be called among Indian historians, 'the greatest literary architect'.

In Tamil his writing a short story when he was but twelve years old – 'The wood cutter' (உலவையார்) has been mentioned already as his earliest published literary writing. i.e. half a century later when he was relatively free from official academic work his native genius began to work itself out in various new channels; from 1977 to nearly 2000 he has been writing, off and on, short stories, plays, and poems, while also editing, with commentaries and long historical introductions the collected poems of some ancient poets. The fertility of his mind, its versatility, its energy and its originality are astonishing and naturally his social inventions found their most fluent channel in the Tamil short story.

N.S. wrote 48 short stories in Tamil of which 12 belong to his only Tamil attempt at detective story writing which he includes among short stories for reasons he has elaborately mentioned in his long instructive and innovative introduction to the second volume of short stories, Uma: an introduction that runs to 32 pages. It seems to be almost sure that most of his critics – appreciative or hostile – and generally speaking most readers do not read his introduction, prefaces, dedications and other useful and interesting appendages – the former will help even a dull reader understand why the rest of the book is what it is. Without reading these instructive introductions, they plunge into the book, as usual think secondhand and judge his writings by their accustomed weekend journal authors. This is N.S.' personal misfortune for which there can be no explanation but which has certainly led to lot of misunderstanding by otherwise intelligent readers. If the introduction to Uma had been read in detail by the readers as it ought to be, it would have not

25. Vide Prof. N.S. 'the man and his work: article on Dr. N.S; a maverick Indian intellectual' – the comments on 'Kāmu and Gōpu'.
only avoided the unthinking observation of V.V.S. Aiyar as the first short story writer in Tamil, it would also have made them realise what a short story really is. There is a whole book on short stories recently published\(^{26}\) which begins by swearing by E.A. Poe but continues to commit the accustomed mistake, of giving a Tamil definition to short stories;\(^{27}\) and N.S.’ short stories are too disturbing or in the alternative too worthless (in the opinion of the anthologists) for inclusion in any anthology of short stories and so they remain relatively unknown. Another reason for this is that they were never serialised in weekend journals, which are the staple intellectual food of the contemporary Tamil literate.

1. Kāmu and Gōpu:

This is a collection of 12 short, simple detective stories – concentrating not on the quality of the prose style but on characterisation and the new (to the Indian) concept of a husband and a wife being both detectives, Kāmu being one of the cleverest of N.S.’ fictional creations. The last story on ‘Inspector Ramanjam’ remains unfinished. The stories it is claimed of course, as the literary tradition in some quarters goes, were entrusted in mss – to N.S. and that he is only their editor. A technique which Rider Haggard, Conan Doyle and others have adopted. The detectives grow in their techniques and abilities with time and so this is an evolutionary series (and not template) because the detectives go on changing and learning new techniques in course of time and are not of the same detective ability from the very beginning as in the case of Fr. Brown or Sherlock Holmes. This is a different kind of detective fiction the nature of which Dorothy L. Sayers clarifies. “His style is witty, clear, and persuasive, free from violent sensationalism on the one hand and

\(^{26}\) The Tamil Short Story: Chitti and Sivapāṇha Sundaram.

\(^{27}\) As the Indian Politicians give unauthorised definition to ‘secularism’ etc. words and ideas, which come from elsewhere, must bear the stamp of their origins.
academic prosperity on the other; his characters, within their limitations, have the breath of life in them and concerned belief and enthusiastic affection. Besides he initiates (the Tamil) reader into the romantic adventure of the intellect, exciting him, not by a mollification of shocks and horrors..........

That he has left his last story i.e. on Inspector Ramanujam unfinished could have been symbolic of the endlessness of the process of crime and detection in the human soul. The art of conversation between the lovers - the two detectives, husband and wife - in Kāmuvum Gōpuvum is a successful example of writing intimate lovers talk without ever approaching even the borders of obscenity: a point much missed by some critics of the work who do not appreciate humour.

2. Uma:

All his short stories need elaborate treatment, for they are off the beaten track and even those who profess to specialize in modern Tamil literature have not the patience to understand the nuances and subtleties of the stories – at least some of them. We shall deal with only the most important ones of this category. Uma is the first story in the collection bearing that name and there are 14 stories in it. Some of them had appeared in some journals, but the rest were put together for the first time in 1992.

There are just two stories which need comment for one gets a feeling that they have not been either understood or subjected to prejudice and inability to think in advanced moral terms as for example is done in the Principia Ethica (1903) of G.E. Moore or any other modern philosopher. N.S. expects his readers to know that his books are to be read differently from

28. Tales of detection (ed) Dorothy L. Sayers, Introduction PXI. We have discussed this particular work because it has been grossly misrepresented.
those of many others; for there are (implicit) implications which one cannot
grasp without prior knowledge of various other matters; and whenever he
makes any singular observation even in his short stories he does not make
them without a reason which may not be obvious to many average readers;
e.g. in the story in ‘Maṇi’ in Uma he says that the professor laid aside other
books but chose the Vanity Fair of Thackeray, for he wanted to read over
again about Becky Sharp (in Thackeray’s Vanity Fair) to compare a certain
person he was thinking of with that character. This cannot be understood by
those who have not done their Vanity Fair; compare this with the strange girl
(the heroine Radha) reading the forepart of the Arabian Nights on the eventful
day. Why should she not read any other book then? It was not accidental. N.S.
puts that book particularly in her hands to suggest (but not openly) the truth
i.e. ‘Frailty! thy name is woman’. It is too much to expect even a fairly well
educated person to infer this.30 His stories are strewn with too many such
instances for enumeration. On p.10131 the statement ‘we are co-sufferers........we are not to weep over each other’s shoulders’ is a
quotation-minus the quotation mark – from a famous Vaishnava
commentator. Here is a scholar who writes an entertaining but problem
raising (as well as problem solving short story!). How can one compare him
with the more fashionable and better-advertised short story writers now? He is
tough reading that way; but for the kind of reader N.S. keeps in mind the
stories are about the best written during the past century.

There are two stories in Uma one involving a question of psychology
and the other of morals. The former is Maṇi and the latter is ‘Kuṟṟavăḷigal’. The
psychological problem is to find an answer to why Maṇi rejected
Padma’s offer of marriage, though he loved her. He rejects because he is a

30. I learnt these implications in the course of an interview with N.S. himself.
31. ‘Rādhā Koṭutta Coffee’ in Raṅganāthamīn Maṇḍi.
man’ and in men pride overcomes even ‘love’ as jealousy conquered love in Othello – that is not the case with woman: this is at least N.S.’ view and he seems to be supported in it by more than authority.\textsuperscript{32} In the ‘kuṟṟavāli gal’ (the criminals) – the husband who turned robber to maintain his family and the wife who sold her honour to save her dying child: the ethical question is embarrassing when the two confront each other with their respective accusations.

The second collection Kaṇaiyāli (the ring) begins with the earliest story N.S. wrote while he was only 12 years old (1926) - the wood cutter and contains 11 stories of which Palikkāda Kanavu (the unfulfilled dream) and the Muṟinda Uravu (the broken link) are important for their very strangeness: one very familiar and the other very casual. About the long story Sukanya (40 pages) Mrs.Prema Nandakumar writes: “there are veins of the lower mental consciousness brought to creative life into an extraordinary short hand: the story Sukanya for instance…… Also the Naḍavāda Nihačchi. This is, perhaps, the reason why they say tragedy is comic; but comedy is mundane”.\textsuperscript{33}

The third or in fact the fourth, if we include Kāmu vum Gōpuvum among his short story collections as N.S. would want us to, viz., Raṅganāthanin Maṟadi raises a few points which need consideration, in fact, rebuttal. For the critics whoever have expressed themselves, have read the stories carelessly and missed the preface altogether. The concerned stories

\textsuperscript{32} Vide Sir Walter Scott’s Surgeon’s daughter (p.52): “Alas! Men do not know how to love like women; their attachment is only one of a thousand other passions and predilections’. Agatha Christie is more explicit: “Women possess little or no pride where love affairs are concerned. Pride is a quality often on their lips but not apparent in their actions” suggesting that the opposite is the case with men: ‘Towards Zero’, p.84.

\textsuperscript{33} In her letter to N.S.dt.20.10.1993.
are: 1. *Totti Mudal KattilVarai*; 2. *Ranganathanin Maradi*. The first story is faulted on the ground that it is incredible that father and daughter could not have recognized each other. But the critics forget that Oedipus and his mother did not recognize each other. Actually the story seems to be a tremendous comment – on the ‘cradle baby’ idea as Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* was on the workhouse and his *Bleack House* on the Chancery Court. As for the second one, even a competent critic thought it proper to be content to say that it is a Tamil short story of Sakunthala and Dhushyanta. The critic has no patience to read the penultimate paragraph of the preface to the work where the author shows how shallow this criticism of comparison of this story with the Sakunthala story is. None of these critics seems to have realized that N.S. never writes (or even speaks) without a special purpose of his own which is usually unique. The critic dared not imagine that a writer could dare to criticise and try to improve upon Kalidasa. That the tradition of the Greek tragic drama was in the back of N.S.’ mind could not be suspected by the critic. It is perhaps too much to expect from an uncritical reviewing tradition.

5. Plays:

N.S. has written a number of plays, full – sized Five Act plays as well as short ones and even simple dialogues amounting to plays in the net effect. The first two volumes of plays and dialogues called *Socrates* and *Dharma Dēvatai* were both published in 1995. *Socrates* consists of six pieces of which *Seemāvin titṭam, Tirudan* and *Socrates* are full plays; the first is in two Acts, each Act in five scenes; it is a domestic story in which the resourceful son and his intrepid wife by clever means reform a cynical mother (mother – in – law); the second is a strange play and is in 8 scenes and in excitingly and

34. *Vide* Prof. N.S. *The man and his work*, p245, lines 24, 25.

35. It is notable that a high percentage of his prose and fictional works in English as well as in Tamil were written after his full retirement from University teaching service in Shillong (1979).
usually new type of dialogue. The whole thing is designed by artificial and is explained by the author himself at the end of the play in a suffix and gives 8 facets to the extra ordinariness of the theme. The third one Socrates is in the conventional Five Act pattern, tells the tragic story of Socrates in moving dialogue, and occasionally sprinkled with appropriate humour. It is a complete tragedy. The dialogues 1. The family affair (among three celestial ladies – Hindu goddesses) is humorous and can be enjoyed by those, who know Hindu Puranic mythology well. The ‘last shot’ (Kaññasi Guñḍu) is a deadly shot, and the two martyrs met in heaven (Swarghalôkkhält îru tyāgigal) is an imaginary conversation between Alexander the Great and Edward VIII. The Hitler – Gandhi dialogue is likely to shock committed Gandhiîtes – for it ends with Hitler triumphantly declaring that of the two he is the winner, for the world quotes Gandhi and acts Hitler. Their innermost faith is in the dictator; the lip service paid to Gandhi is for personally beneficial purposes.

The Dharma dëvatai consists of seven themes each in dialogue form and some are subdivided into smaller scenes: 1. Drôṇa is in 6 scenes; 2. Karṇa is in 7 scenes; 3. Aśvatttāma in two scenes; 4. Samvadam is a single scene piece; 5. Vâli is in 3 scenes; 6. Sîta is in 3 scenes; 7. Mahâbali is in 2 scenes. Karṇa, as in the Epic Musings is very clearly the author’s favourite among mythological heroes.

His barbs against the revered divine incarnation Krishna himself are intended and outspoken. His unorthodox handling of what are usually considered themes in sacred epics makes some critics rather hastily conclude that he is an atheist. He says in the preface clearly and in the invocatory (kâppu) verse that he is rejecting the puranic pantheon in moral disgust and is installing in its place his own Goddess of Righteousness as the supreme deity. Such a person could not be an atheist. Only he has abolished the old deities
and installed instead his own according to him a superior ultimate Goddess of Righteousness. The same theme, which worked out differently in the Epic Musings in which his impatience with moral compromises and celestial misbehavior is very clear.

In A.D. 2000 he wrote a short play in six scenes on a currently social theme in which the corrupt prosper and virtuous suffer due to the developing political atmosphere. It is pungent, humorous as well as tragic, though the hero – the idealist District Collector, who wants to rid the administration of corruption fails in his mission and even gets punished for the very attempt he makes to reform the status quo and emerges as an upholder of pragmatism.

The last play he has written is on Auvaiyār, a historical play – like Socrates – and is suggestively tragic. In this play Auvaiyār is transformed into a gifted young gypsy girl full of aesthetic resources and a great poetess and a political idealist. The recast of Auvaiyār is an entirely novel achievement and is by and large acceptable. He upholds the same theme in his critical edition of Auvaiyār's poems and in a long historical introduction.

6. He has edited old classics and new ones with or without commentaries but always with critical introductions. 1. Paraṇar's poems; 2. Auvaiyār's poems; 3. Balarama Aiyar's poems with his biography prefixed to it. 4. Balarāma Aiyar's three plays; 5. The Ānandaraṅgan Kōvai of Thyagaraja Desikar with Balarāma Aiyar's commentary; 6. The Yavanămbigai Pillai Tamil, composed by his father, with N.S.' commentary; 7. Mayuram Gōpala Krishna Aiyar's Hanumān Pillai Tamil, with N.S.' commentary and critical introduction. He also edited in 1970 the V.G.Śrīyanārāyana Sāstri centenary volume with fairly exhaustive introductions in English and in Tamil.
7. Critical Essays:

There are two kinds of critical essays N.S. has written in English as well as in Tamil. One category is literary and general; the other relates to historical and allied topics. The latter, apart from what have been published and have been dealt with in this thesis in chapters III and IV, are all in English and remain as mss awaiting publication. The critical essays are on a disparate variety of topics: Miscellaneous Essays. There are more than 40 such essays: they range from an essay on ‘theory’ one on, ‘the two fanatics,’ another on Shakespearean ‘Tragedy’, ‘the Siva-Vishnu, dichotomy in the history of puranic Hinduism’. They were written between 1996 and 2001. There are historiographical papers, presidential addresses and a pamphlet – size article on ‘the present state of historical studies in the higher educational centres of Tamilnad’. His ‘Śaṅgam Political history papers’ – some published already in journals some yet unfinished ones have been collected and edited but await publication. He has more than ten valuable mss. bundles which ought to be published but cannot be for reasons N.S. refuses to divulge. The one ms. deserves immediate publication and wide publicity; and that is the collection of ‘Gandhi Papers’ of which ‘Gandhi and his associates’ is the most important one.36

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36. When N.S. communicated the contents of his paper on ‘Gandhi’ and his ‘associates’ to a learned and respected friend of his, he wrote in a letter dt.27.2.92 as follows: “As to your work on Gandhi and his associates, you should not take any risk regarding your personal safety; instead you should ask yourself with Cicero ‘cui bono’? Whether a society as ours deserves it, for you know from your long experience – that the sarcastic aphorism by Lichtenberg (a contemporary of Kant and Goethe) is proved with every other day: ‘There are people who are inclined to listen only after cutting off their ears’. But I have my doubts whether even after such a surgery for philanthropic reasons the expected effect would occur”. N.S. in the course of an interview with me merely read out the passage but refused to divulge the name of the correspondent. N.S. was not having any idea of publishing the mss since it contained some dreaded truth. In 2003 he has published ‘Gandhi and his Associates’. N.S. has written and published the ‘Psychobiography of C.Subramania Bhārati’; and as indicated by the above quoted correspondent, it had no effect whatsoever. The readers had no need for a surgery; they were born deaf and dumb.
8. N.S. has written 28 critical essays and published them in two volumes *Tamil Varalāṟṟu Ilakkiya Chintanaigal* and *Tamil Ārāichikkaṭṭurigal*, the third book deals with the origin, growth and present status of Tamil literature (Tamil Ilakkiyam); the fourth is a study of *Paridimāl Kalaiṅār and Dramatic Literature*, the printed version of lectures delivered in the Madurai Kamaraj University under the auspices of the *Sankaradāś Swāmi Endowment*. He has 12 more newly researched and innovative essays (and two more are contemplated) but they are not yet published. Of the published papers special mention must be made of his article on *Tamilir Pahāppadaṅgal* (root words in Tamil) in which he holds all the ‘Tamil’ words now known are derived from not more than 500 root words; and gives details and exemplifies his thesis.

Among the disciplines in which N.S. is interested, and to which he has contributed, Aesthetics is one and he has written a book on the *Aesthetic of Drama and Stalin’s Plays*. He has made a deep study of the Freudian view of Aesthetics and his study of Leonardo and Michaelangelo.

9. N.S’ language and style:

It has been often said in this thesis that N.S. gives equal importance to matter and to manner, substance and to style, like good intentions and agreeable good manners making personality perfect. He insists on the language not only being correct but also being elegant. In the case of N.S. the style is often not only elegant, but original, his own and identifiable with his personality. He has developed a style, which reveals the author by the mere fact of the style being what it is. This is the case with his English as well as his Tamil, though it is much more so in the case of English. In Tamil his norm for prose is a careful solecism - free compromise between the style of the

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37. In his unpublished *Miscellaneous Papers*, he has an article ‘The Fundamental Aesthetic Proposition – a re-examination’.
medieval commentators — in the brevity of expression — and intelligibility even from the point of view of the average weekend journal reader. Many astute readers have often exclaimed ‘I am able to see N.S.’ hand in this presentation’. Such is his originality of style.

There are four important points to be noted so far on N.S’ language and style are concerned. 1. It is often epigrammatic; 2. It is characterized by subtle, dry humour, which makes one smile and ponder than laugh and make merry. 3. His habit of suiting English idioms and Tamil poetic phrases to suit his current purposes; like using as the subtitle to his autobiography in Tamil the Kural phrase ‘Iru Vēru Ulgattiyarkai’. His humour is best seen in his writings in either language but more in English than in Tamil. We shall mention the entire writing in the account of the happenings in the joint family described in Pandora’s Box and his essay on the ‘anatomy of corruption’ and in ‘the hewers of wood and the chewers of betel’. His aim is not to cut a joke or tickle the reader but to drive a point home in as lively a fashion as possible. His humour lies somewhere in the broad borderland between wit and sarcasm with a slight slant towards the latter. He is not a professional joker, i.e. even in his creative writings, like Jerome or P.G. Wodehouse. He has enough command of vocabulary in both languages. As he has learnt his Tamil in the traditional way, the Nikandus (the Tamil Thesauri) are at his finger tips; and the two volumes of the Random House Dictionary and the latest Oxford English Reference Dictionary (1996) are permanently in a corner of his writing table and the six volumes of the Tamil lexicon and the Nikandus are always at hand. Jones’ Pronouncing Dictionary and Brewar’s Dictionary of Phrases and Fables and the Dictionary of Bartlett’s as well as Penguin’s Quotations are his constant companions and in frequent requisition.
His style can be best illustrated by a few quotations from his readers who have enjoyed and understood the real nature of his humour in particular and style in general.

1. A.Ranganathan, a respected correspondent of a respectable newspaper, wrote on reading his, 'Hindu Tripod' “I cannot convey my pleasure in a mere letter. You’ve dealt with the fundamental problems at the level of scholarship. What impressed me most was the \textit{almost clinical objectivity} with which you have discussed our problems. And finally I would like to repeat what I have said on an earlier occasion – I’ve always admired your \textit{original turns of phrasing}. For instance, one can hardly improve upon the following phrase for its originality of thought and expression... “The Hindu unlike the proverbial and vulnerable glass house dweller can afford to throw metaphorical stones at other cultures…”\textsuperscript{38}

2. Philip Spratt, “I appreciate its (the Hindu Tripod’s) dignified humour”. “The attraction of the enigmatic subject is enhanced by a dryly humorous style”.

3 Ainslie Embree (Chicago) “your dismissal of Panikkar is both witty and true”. (Letter dt. 18.8.1971).

4. J.D.M. Derrett, ‘I have just finished going through it (\textit{The H.T}) I particularly liked your humour’. “You throw off sparks like a Catherine Wheel. Some of them catch” (letter dt.11.8.1969).

5. Prema Nandakumar: “There is such a fine spontaneity about your writing in English. It comes trailing clouds of glory from the past whether it is Greek mythology or Brahmin joint family. What holds your writing together is \textit{dark laughter} (letter dt.22.9.1993).

\textsuperscript{38} Vide his letter dt.9.11.1970.
But most writers ignore his humour and his style, for once they are upset by the hostility to the author for his controversial views, all else is forgotten by them. But we shall give just three examples of how he handles the English language.

“Undraped womanhood bedecked in flowers” p.310. S P.I. ed

1. To enjoy the spirituous drink better, they used to have bits of ginger with them; to ensure an unfailing and ready supply of 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”. (p.308. S.P.Ied.)

2. They (the modern Brahmins) move forward no doubt but with strong chains – attached to their feet - chains, which pull them, back to a remote ancient point. Among the links of the chain are 1. Superstitions, which they call religion; 2. Indifference, which they call tolerance; 3. Blind addiction to the past which they call respect for heritage; 4. Irrational belief, which they call faith, 5. Lack of unity, which they think is the freedom of the individual; 6. Pride, which they think is self-confidence; 7. Jealousy, which they confuse with healthy competitiveness; 8. Rationalization of the indefensible, which they consider clear proof; 9. Cleverness, which they think is wisdom; 10. Accumulation of facts, which they mistake for knowledge; 11. Bravado, which they attribute to courage; 12. A craze for the status quo, which they call consolidation of culture; 13. Pretension, which they call diplomacy – and so on endlessly.

The way the contrasting and mistaken attitudes are put together is absolutely unparalleled in Indian contribution to English literary writing.
This is pure English and not influenced at all by the idiom of the author's mother tongue.

In his Tamil short stories he simply follows the rules he has himself laid down as definition of a short story. It must be mostly based on personal experience and always centre round a single theme; which he does so well that he shares the fate of George Meredith who after writing his *Egoist* had the misfortune to take to a number of persons who imagined they were meant by Meredith's Egoist. In many of N.S.' short stories his experience comes out often thinly veiled; for after all he wants the world to know the truth about his own life as much as he wants to entertain his readers.

In his verses he as much insists on rhyme as in prose he insists on rhythm and dignity of diction.

10. N.S. has done quite a bit of translation work. He has written six-printed pages of a long essay on translations in general; and has himself done the following translations most of which remain unpublished. 1. Political texts in the *Tolkäppiyam* and the *Pälamoḷi* (400), published in the *Rājavidyā*; 2. he has translated only 7 verses (one of which will be found in an appendix to this thesis) of the *Paripāḍal*, a Tamil Šaṅgam Political anthology; he has done the entire *Aṟattuppāl* of the *Tirukkural* into English prose and has tried to be loyal to the original text in word and spirit – which most translators including G.U. Pope have failed to do. His mention of the difficulty in translating the Šaṅgam anthologies; for only the words can be translated but the atmosphere (very special to Šaṅgam literary tradition) will remain behind that as an impenetrable mist. This point was well brought out by a Czech scholar (working then in the Tanjore University as a research scholar) in a letter to N.S. dt. 16.5.1986. He in particular mentioned A.K.Ramanujan’s failure to translate the *Kuruntogai* word *Natpu* normally ‘friendship’ – for in that
context it is much more than 'love' or 'friendship': it is rapport. Philip Spratt who had read N.S. translation of Tolkappiyam political material praised his translations in his letter dt. 12.3.1967.

11. N.S.’ attempts at editing ancient classical texts with his commentaries and historical introductions and discovering secular historical causes for what is put in the conventional language of superstition is obvious in those introductions. His introductions to some works — especially which call themselves ‘historical’, be they plays or novels — are not only considerable, covering in all nearly 400 printed pages, but also pathbreaking and scholarly; which remain unrivalled; e.g. his introduction to Chandilyan’s historical novel ‘kaṭal Purā’ and Stalin’s social play ‘Ūrmiḻa’.

Dr. Derrett was the only reader of N.S’ (English) works who has noted and has written down in his characteristically frank and critical manner the real nature of N.S.’ style and the peculiarities in the use of that language, his diction, syntax, humour and some oddities — all of which are true but one or two of them require clarification. 1. Subramanian’s own style is very Hindu Indian (I am not commenting on the impeccable English); 2. It is a quarry of bon mots. 3. The lapidary style of Indian scholars survives in a writer whom no one would accuse of limitation of anyone whatsoever. 4. New sutras (epigrams) are being spun out and the pages of his book abound with attractive quotations. 5. We know that meticulous scholarship, forthright speech, and the absence of overt bias could be expected from the author of the Śaṅgam Polity. 6. Certain winds (of which Subramanian complains: Historiography P.457) blight sincere researchers and frank speakers. Many will welcome a craftsman whose back is proof against such winds, and whose patriotism is forward and not backward looking. 7. I was impressed by his Hindu Tripod (1956) especially liking his evaluation of the joint family

39. like diamond — cutting, for instant.
mentality which I should heartily confirm from my own knowledge; but when I compared the forthright style with that of (C.Nirad Chaudury) I was even more impressed with the originality, not merely of the views expressed but especially of the absence of that Victorian 'mealy mouthed tone which is still characteristic of well-bred Indian comment on Indian affairs.40

8. Characteristically he quotes constantly from foreign authors.

The *bon mots* he refers to are truly characteristic of N.S; the sutra style follows therefore. His *Random Thoughts* are a positive proof of this intellectual belief of N.S. Since, only scholars like Derrett and Herring and Burton Stein have critically read and sincerely appreciated the true scholarship and superior authorship (in contrast even to those who have received international recognition and awards), N.S. depends upon and quotes foreign authors oftener than local ones. Dr.Derrett himself has answered the point he has raised when he speaks about the absence of local bias in them.

N.S. is a problematic scholar in the sense that he defies precise definition; for his achievements cover a wide spectrum and are of almost equal importance in all their spheres. These motivating forces which led him to his clinical 'objectivity' as an authorial goal and criterion can be traced

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40. This comparison of N.S. with the 'well-known Chandhury is worth noting; for in a private letter to N.S. Dr.Derrett has again compared Chaudhury with N.S. advantageously to the latter: He says: "your tone and style are delightful, though I detect a bitter touch occasionally which is nothing compared with that of Nirad Chaudhury". These points of comparison of N.S. with Nirad Chaudhury with advantage to the former must make the author of the article on "Dr.N.S.: A Maverick Indian Intellectual" rethink her views on the relative English literary merits of Chaudhury and N.S. where she refers to the latter as "devoid of the cheer in his writing; and Chaudhury and Narayan score several points there and keep the frontline for themselves". The very valid points raised by Dr.Derrett are missed by this estimate.
back to the early days of his life when he made a promise unto himself to be just and fair and never hurt or harm.\textsuperscript{41}

He believes in independent, original thinking on every (especially moral) issue by and for himself and never depending totally on authority howsoever sacred. He has put up a printed message to that effect in the library of 7000 books he has built up; he is familiar with all those books and some of them are very dear to him.

In his poem on Ullurai (which means 'the inner meaning') he recites the story of a rose flower which prides itself on its ability to please all the sensory faculties of all persons – sweet smell, soft touch, attracting beauty and sweetness to the lingual taste buds – but one, viz. the ability to sing and please the ear. Her sense of deficiency was dispelled by a bee that came that way buzzing, sat on her pistils, drank deeply of the honey on the petals – all the while humming her buzz. The delighted rose gave herself up to the humming bee which when its function was over flew away to seek other flowers and other honey. The poor rose flower gained nothing by what had happened but stood deprived of her honey – one of those things, which satisfied the taste of a lover. This is the story of the phenomenon of a contact, which gained nothing but lost much by a strange relationship. At the end of this poem of 46 verses, the 47\textsuperscript{th} challenges the reader to discover the inner meaning of the allegory; that C.Subramania Bharati, one may remember made a similar challenge to his readers to discover what his Kuyil Pāṭṭu meant. N.S. has given a psychoanalytical meaning.\textsuperscript{42} But N.S' poem has defied discovery. No one seems to try to solve the riddle. But N.S. himself admitted that 'some day the truth must be known and why not now?' And he said that the poem stood for the British occupation of India, which failed to get the best out of the

\textsuperscript{41} Vide En \textit{Vēlkkai Varalaru}: pp.424, 425

\textsuperscript{42} e.g p.164 of \textit{Psychology of C.Subramaniya Bharati}
occupying powers, but lost the best of its own culture. The allegory is related to the first allegory -'a jungle tale' -in the *Pandora’s Box* in which the old, British lion deprived of its Empire ruefully witnesses what is happening to the relics which escaped its clutches. The fox plays an interpretative part. Then there is the often-repeated question why in his *En Vālkkai Varalāru* he leaves his own family entirely out of picture. In the Alter ego article on *N.S. the man and his work* the answer is given on P.126 of that book. Then there is the most tantalising of all questions in The ‘Echoes’; i.e. who was or is Dora? Did or does such a person exist? Many have tried and have naturally differently answered. The only answer to this is that there is no definite answer to it; of course no one can have the indelicacy to ask N.S. himself about this. But the poems have been written to Dora linked by some to the ‘Greek Tragedy’ in *Pandora’s Box* – and to prose poems and concluded that the possibility of the reality of Dora cannot be ruled out. But any conclusion could cut both ways.

The last and most elusive question is ‘who is this alter ego,’ who wrote the piece *N.S. the man and his work* (PP 28 to 126)? The official assumption seems to be that the editor of the festschrift had done it. But almost everything in the article suggests that this could not be the case. The language and the details are very much pointing their finger to N.S. himself- writing about himself in the third person. Naturally he refuses to commit himself in this regard.

N.S. is very sensitive in the matter of criticism and he is not sorry but angry with any unreasonably adverse critic, or one who criticises his writings for personal or non-academic reasons: so the following is the last passage he read out to me during one of those days when I was interviewing him.

“Look here! Listen to this! “He said and read out: ‘an author whether good or bad, or between both, is an animal that everybody is privileged to
attack: for though all are not able to write books, all conceive themselves able to judge them. A bad composition carries with it its own punishment — contempt and ridicule. A good one excites envy and entails upon its author a thousand mortifications; he finds himself assailed by partial and ill-humored criticism; one man finds fault with the plan, another with the style, a third with the precept which it strives to inculcate; and they who cannot succeed in finding fault with the book, employ themselves in stigmatising the author. They maliciously make out from obscurity every little circumstance, which may throw ridicule upon his private character or conduct, and aim at wounding the man since they cannot hurt the writer. In short, to enter the lists of literature is wilfully to expose you to the arrows of neglect, ridicule, envy and disappointment. Whether you write well or ill, be assured that you will not escape from blame... But authorship is a mania, to conquer which no reasons are sufficiently strong.”

43. M.G. Lewis: The Monk p.204.