INTRODUCTORY
INTRODUCTION

Writing about W.M. Thackeray, the famous 19th Century English novelist, Anthony Trollope says: "The desire is common to all readers to know not only what a great writer has written but also of what nature has been the man who has produced such great work". Thus it will be necessary to prefix a biography to a general criticism of the immense work professor N.S. has done.

This thesis proposes to fairly exhaustively study Professor N.S. the well-known historian and critically examine his work in the capacity of a multifaceted scholar. His work is so vast and reaches such scholarly heights often that a thoughtful critical study of his work is considered already overdue and this thesis intends filling the gap. He has been living a full and purposeful life of conscientious scholarly preoccupation as a reader, writer, teacher and public speaker for the past eight decades and more. His work is the product of a mind which constantly thinks original thoughts and a pen that puts them in unprecedentally elegant language - English or Tamil; for he is proficient in both languages to a degree rarely reached by many co-workers in the fields of thought familiar to him: and his writings cover a number of related and unrelated disciplines, though mainly and professionally he is a historian. The main purpose of this thesis will be to study his historical works as well as all his other work fully and critically present them.

N.S.' intellectual assets were manifold, it was observed before. That means he has studied deeply in, and has written works on subjects closely allied to history like archaeology, sociology, political science, and economics; but has contributed also to disciplines somewhat distantly allied to it like

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1. In the English Men of Letters series, Vide Thackeray, p1. (1925)
literature, law and philosophy. His literature included English and Tamil and both extensively and deeply. This was because he had the good fortune to study English with acknowledged masters of that language; and Tamil ran in the family as it were. He was not merely a critical historian but a creative litterateur in English as well as in Tamil. Thus N.S.' intellectual equipment was not acquired for the mere purpose of teaching the examinees of universities but for its own sake and at as high a level as circumstances of his life would permit. Every artist's achievement, especially intellectual or aesthetic is the product of his character\(^2\); and so, to properly estimate N.S.' academic activities it would be necessary to know at least the broad outlines of his life. But the account of his personal life from childhood to now which this chapter gives will be restricted to as much of it as is necessary to explain his intellectual and academic public life\(^3\) only, and to the extent to which the home encouraged or restricted as the case might have been, his public academic prosperity.

The sources, which have supplied the needed information regarding his personal life are mentioned in the chapter immediately following this.

**Career**

It was on the 1\(^{st}\) of January 1916 that N.S was born\(^4\) in Chidambaram,

\(^2\) N.S. himself believes strongly that art is the product of the personal life of the artist, as aestheticians like Oscar Wilde believed: *vide* his *The Picture of Dorian Gray.*

\(^3\) This is what N.S has himself done in his autobiography written in Tamil.

\(^4\) In his Tamil autobiography he casts doubt on the accuracy of this date. He is of opinion that the date was invented by his father while entering his date of birth in the official SSLC book for the sake of convenient remembrance. A reference to the concerned almanac seems to confirm the 27\(^{th}\) day of June 1915 as his date of birth - a Sunday and a Full Moon day. But for purposes of our biography he was born on 1.1.1916.
Tamilnad. N.Balarama Aiyar, the then well-known Tamil scholar who was teaching in the Town High School, Cuddalore, was his father. Sivakami Ammal from Chidambaram was his mother. N.S. was the seventh surviving child and second son of his parents. He came of learned lineage on the spear as well as the distaff side of the family. On the maternal side one finds such great Vaidiks like Venkatesa Aiyaval and on the paternal side Vedanti Krishna Aiyar, a classmate in Vedantic studies of the famous Ramalingaswami of Chidambaram. N.S.' elder brother Muthuswami who was later practicing as a lawyer in Coimbatore was his senior by ten years (being born in 1905). The fraternal relation of the younger to the elder was unusually deferential in view of the long chronological gap between the two.

The family was poor; N.S.' father was the only earning member of the family. He, the eldest son of his father had lost him when he (N.S.' father) was but 18 years old; and so like in lower middle class urban families he had to sustain an overpopulated household on a meagre salary. But since by nature he was wedded to the easy chair and a long list of ancient tough Tamil works, occasionally relaxing with solving mathematical and chess problems and reading a few favourite English novels, he was far from money or worldly minded. N.S. then was the youngest child in the family when in 1918 his father left Cuddalore for Karaikudi where he became the Head Tamil Pandit; then N.S. was but three years old. In those days children were not admitted to school at the age of two or three as they are done now; few children went to school before the age of five. N.S., however missed his school till 1922; when he was actually past six years when he was experimentally put into the elementary section of the school where pupils wrote the alphabet on the sand

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5. N.S. always spelt Tamilnad and never Tamilnadu, unless officially compelled. He knows that the end u in Nadu in Tamil is short u (kurijyalugaram;) and he thinks it had better be omitted.

with their forefingers or used cudgel leaf and the stylus. A day after his admission he hurt himself with the stylus and his father took him away from the school and deferred his admission to school by a year more. So it was only in 1923 June he joined the IV class of the S.M.S.V. Karaikudi. From then till the end of the academic year 1928-29 when he passed the IV Form examination (i.e. in March 1929) he got on with his studies so well that he collected most of the academic prizes and the general proficiency prize each year. But to the same or even greater extent he shunned games and sports and entertainments. He either listened to his father teaching other students various subjects, at home; or he sat down and read ceaselessly. He would finish off his class homework in half an hour and spend a lot of time reading story books-English and Tamil; almost all the standard ones internationally recognized as such in those days. Before he finished his II Form (now known as the VII Standard) he had read the original and full version of Sandford and Merton, Evenings at Home and Alice in Wonderland with a lot of A.L.Bright Story Readers in the meantime. He always spent some time summarising these stories in his own English, thereby developing even then his capacity for writing the language on his own and increasing and improving the fund of his vocabulary. He took special pleasure in sitting far away in some corner of the house and reading aloud Macaulay’s Lays of Ancient Rome, especially the verses relating to Horatius’ defence of the bridge. In Tamil he had read a number of pleasant and instructive stories written by S.M.Natesa Sastri, B.R.Rajam Aiyar and Madhavaiah. Neither his father nor his masters at school ever objected to - on the other hand they encouraged- his reading this extra-syllabus learned books. He read the Panchatantra of Tandavaraya Mudaliar and the Kathasarit Sāgara. The fund of stories from the Arabian Nights which he carried in his youthful head was enormous. His love of history and literature grew simultaneously; but fortunately or otherwise it was also accompanied by an intense and instinctive dislike for mathematics and
experimental science. His mind was naturally attracted by imaginative narratives rather than delimited factualities. He played chess like his father did and both by nature and by personal choice avoided playing cards; for he preferred a silent game to a noisy one and one which involved thinking to one which was essentially gambling.

In his father’s household he was the only boy, the rest being his mother and his sisters; only one was younger than he. His father was a strict domestic disciplinarian, his sense of discipline bordering on despotism. He never interfered with N.S.’ studies nor did he find time to sit down and teach him. In the earlier stages, N.S. learned by hearing what his father taught to other boys - i.e. even when he did not know his alphabets - English or Tamil; later he improved himself by his own efforts. Systematically he learnt advanced Tamil - the classics and high-grade tough grammar much later in life.

When he, either had finished his reading for the day or was driven to inexpressible ennui, he sat on the ridge of the outer verandah (dais) of his house all alone and watched the movements of the clouds, their taking strange and fantastic quick changing shapes and forms and the fall of the rain water through the cornice of the little house they dwelt in. To him the clouds and the falling rains told stories - i.e. stirred his imagination. It is a curious thing - somewhat unprecedented one should say- that he never studied with his school examinations in view, nor did he, when he himself became a teacher, teach his pupils with that end in view.

This attitude towards studies was partly due to the kind of teachers who taught him at the Honours level in the Annamalai University (during 1933-1937) and in the two High Schools earlier; and partly also due to his

7. As the fire was telling stories to little Tom Dombey (Dombey and Son) and Lousia (Hard Times) and Lizzy (Our Mutual Friend) in Charles Dickens' novels.
innate nature of doing a thing for its own sake, not as duty, but as a way of intellectual and moral life in the academic world.

N.S. lived alone in the midst of a large family and his love of solitude continues even now. He was silent in noisy surroundings. He differed from all the other students in the school in that he never incurred the displeasure of any teacher.

His addiction to solitude and his permanent and almost precocious preoccupation with the perennially interesting storybooks had a strange but unavoidable consequence; viz. lack of friends to talk to or play with. So he talked to himself (mentally of course) when he was alone, debating matters, which seemed important to him then. Even moral questions bothered him at that age, i.e. of 5 to 10. He saw with extreme pain gripping his sensitive heart, the one-man-elementary-school-teacher torturing, in the name of discipline, a number of very young boys; he privately and fervently wished he had the power to punish that teacher.

Much of his character, which was to retain its flavour through life and guide its course and determine his decisions, was formed while in Karaikudi. His solitude and the numerous stories he had read and had been told, made him think out a story himself, during one of those moments when he was conversing with the clouds. It was in 1926 or 1927 that a story occurred to him and he wrote it down in Tamil as a short story entitled the *Viraguveli* (the woodcutter). He sent the story to the Editor, *Bālavinōdini*, who

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8. *Vide* his *Kuṭṭikkatturalgal* where the elementary school teacher is not an entirely imaginary character.

9. The year is not remembered exactly even by N.S. himself.

promptly published it, and at the end added a blessing to the youthful writer.11

Two circumstances in his life made N.S. seek solitude and avoid 'light' company i.e., from the very beginning. One was his nature; the other was that solitude was enforced by the family situation. This solitude gave him time to not only read and read endlessly, but in between snatch a few hours to 'think';12 not 'brood' nor 'meditate' (in any semi religious sense) but think rationally - argue things out. One half of his mind facing and holding a dialogue with the other. He was not born rich, nor had he powerful and influential connections. He rose by self-effort. This was facilitated by his intellectual inclinations and his father not interfering with his intellectual programmes. Whatever he liked he was allowed to read; and by nature he liked only serious matters of philosophical importance and he disliked science and mathematics, as has been said before, as if by instinct. There was no compulsion from any quarter for him to change his choices. Hence he went along his chosen way and achieved what otherwise would have been beyond his means to achieve.

This had a profound consequence in determining his ways of thinking and writing. He preferred idealism to pragmatic realism and turned humanist instead of wanting to become 'fashionably popular'. The success of the latter in the surrounding world has been a permanent agony to him; but that only makes him more determined in his philosophical convictions. The seeds of all these were sown while he was in Karaikudi and that before he was 13 or 14 years old- the pre adolescent period. These factors governed his character, in

11. This story is later included as the first one in the N.S.'Short Stories collection Vol-III Ruṣiṅganāṭhanin Maṭadi.
12. When George III asked Doctor Johnson whether he was still writing and if so what, the latter replied that those days he 'rather thought than wrote'; so thinking is the foundation on which intellectual achievements can be structured.
so far as external circumstances had any role in it; and his character turned out to be his destiny.

From the beginning he knew the difference between restrained, refined humour and popular, vulgar joking and naturally preferred the former to the latter in his conversations and his writings. He had a liking for drama and orthodox classical Carnatic music and he took after his father in these two preferences. To him the plays staged by the old veterans Gubbi Viranā and the Suguna Vilās Sabhā and the Secretariat Party had an appeal which the cinema and the television failed to produce later; similarly he was perhaps even unconsciously irreversibly partial to everything classical and naturally objected to everything novel which claimed to be virtuous merely because it was 'novel'.

One instance of his precocity could he mentioned. This happened when he was but six or seven years old. It was a Sunday evening. N.S. was just a little more than a child. His duty through life had been to wait on his father whose main intellectual diet was ancient and medieval Tamil works. N.S. knew to identify the books without knowing the alphabet and connecting the names of authors and editors of classics with their writings and publications by hearsay largely and by adventitious identification. He was all ears when his father was teaching his pupils and junior colleagues good old Tamil. His father had had gone to the town library for a meeting, which he was addressing. The boy had a lot of courage when his father was not around; and so he was standing alone, as usual, on one of the steps leading to the main entrance to the house, and watching the thin traffic that was slowly flowing along the narrow street. Then two men- one older and the other much younger, came along and stood in front of N.S.’ house and asked him if it was Balarāma Aṭṭyar’s house and if so if he was in and they could get in to meet

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13. For it was a matter of emotional choice for him.
him. N.S. said his father had gone to the library for a meeting and would take three more hours to return. The elder man then said ‘Tell your father when he returns that Gopāla Aiyar has been here to meet him’; and the two started moving away. The boy knit his brows, thought for a second, and loudly said to himself ‘Is it that Kalīṅgattupparani Gopāla Aiyar?’ The visitors who overheard this stood still and the elder remarked to the younger ‘This child knows to link Gopāla Aiyar with Kalīṅgattupparani; truly did the wise say that in Kambar’s house even a lamppost can compose a poem!.’ The boy in his natural way wanted to know if he looked like a lamppost, but then the visitors had by then moved away. His father who came to know about this outwardly sternly remarked that the boy was becoming too bold but inwardly he was so proud of the precocity of his young son.

In 1929 his father left Karaikudi for Chidambaram where he had been appointed lecturer in Tamil in the Annamalai University which had just then grown out of the Sri Minakshi College, where N.S.’ brother had studied. He was now doing his law in Madras. The University began very well. N.S. left the S.M.S.V. to continue his school studies in the R.C.T.H.S. Chidambaram. G.Srinivasa Aiyar a reputed educationist was then the Headmaster there. The school had on its staff such well-known scholars like S.R.Balasubramaniya Aiyar (the historian) and Bhuvarahana Pillai, the Tamil scholar. For two years (1929-1931) he studied there and continued to do very well and his old Karaikudi tradition of collecting prizes in all competitions - except sports. In 1931 he finished his high school education and joined the Annamalai University Intermediate class where he was advised to do Mathematics, Physics and Logic apart from the compulsory English and his favourite Tamil. He was not much hostile to mathematics, he only disliked it. But physics was different. It was positively inimical and the experimental part of it was his bugbear. He got on somehow but finally in the Intermediate final examination
it was experimental physics, which proved his ruin. He therefore had to waste a whole year more before further higher studies. When he found out that physics and he were born foes he told his father frankly but politely that he would rather change over to the histories and give up his mathematics and physics, but retain his logic for which he had a very natural flair. It was difficult for his father to persuade the Vice-Chancellor S.E.Runganathan\textsuperscript{14} to change the rules just for the sake of one boy; but on second thoughts and out of the high mindedness that was all his own, he agreed. And so began N.S.' acquaintance with the histories – Ancient (Greek and Roman) and modern (British). He had to do his Roman and later British History (post Tudor) by himself but learnt early British History and Greek History from Prof.S.K.Govindaswamy\textsuperscript{15} and Prof.R.Sathyanatha Aiyar\textsuperscript{16} respectively. These teachers were initially responsible for the enormous love, which N.S. developed for historical studies later.

Now Homer to Alexander and Alfred to Lord Cecil became part of his intellectual furniture, to stay there permanently to lay the foundation for N.S.' later historical and sociological studies and make him a literary person in addition to being a historian. For he did closely study such writers like J.B.Bury and G.M.Trevelyan. Logic held the balance even between the imaginative romance of literature and the uncompromising realities of history. His literary and historical studies had a definite impact on his character.

The Annamalai university library which was built up earlier by K.A.Nilakanta Sastri had now become one of the best and most choicely

\textsuperscript{14} That is how he spelt his name. He later became the first Indian High Commissioner in London after 1947.

\textsuperscript{15} Prof.S.K.Govindaswami was the discoverer of the old paintings in the Tanjore Big Temple. He was well versed in all the fine arts. He died young.

\textsuperscript{16} Prof. R.Sathyanatha Aiyar is the famous author of the classic \textit{Nayaks of Madura}; it was he who guided N.S. to the Ph.D. degree.
equipped ones among the South Indian university libraries then. It had a number of all the major classics in all subjects well stocked. When N.S. was doing his History Honours course there it was a paradise for the studious pupil. During 1932 to 1937 many things of great academic value occurred there and influenced N.S. profoundly.

The adolescent period, his teens were spent there. He entered the University as an Intermediate student as a pre-adolescent and left it with his Honours degree in 1937 May as a youth and during the interval of six years he had become academically matured to a remarkable degree and more causes than one contributed to this consummation. The causes led to more than one kind of consequence.

Since his father was teaching in the prestigious Tamil faculty of that University—earlier headed by Professor Vipulanandaji\(^\text{17}\) who wrote the famous \textit{Yāl Nūḷ}, a standard musical treatise on the Tamil harp; and later by Professor S. Somasundara Bharatiyar\(^\text{18}\); N.S. was generally known to and a favourite of both of them. The years 1935 – 1937 saw the Rt.Hon’ble V.S. Srinivasa Sastri as the Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was a great orator, administrator and a gentleman of liberal principles – a primary disciple of G.K. Gokhale - and he profoundly affected N.S., who as Secretary of the History Association of the University had a lot of opportunity to move closely with V.S.S. Sastri officially and personally. N.S. got his definition of ‘scholarship’ ‘honesty in public life’ and similar virtues from him. ‘Time has not withered nor custom

\(^{17}\) The Swamiji was a student of Physics, specialising in ‘sound’ of the London University, a great scholar in Tamil introducing Shakespeare to Tamil scholars as \textit{Matanga Chūlamani}; he was a member of the Ramakrishna Mission.

\(^{18}\) Somasundara Bharatiar was practising as a successful lawyer in Madurai and was a sound scholar in Tamil, a student of the great Thirunarayanai Aiyangar of the Madurai Tamil Śaṅgam. He delighted in literary controversy. His work on \textit{Marivāyil} (the cloud messenger) is well known.
staled' the traits of character which persist in him still.

Prof. C.S. Srinivasachariar, who headed the History Faculty, was a model teacher, excellent critic and researcher; a great humanist and owner of a vast library of carefully chosen books in his house. These books he obliged the better students in his classes to compulsorily read. None of N.S.’ teachers at the University insisted on the pupils confining themselves to the subjects and books prescribed for and recommended to the students from the point of view of the examination. They plainly said they were not there to see pupils through examinations but to teach what they (the teachers) knew; and what they (the teachers) knew was not a little. Of all these teachers however, R.Bhaskaran was the one who taught most subjects to N.S. and influenced him most. The subjects he taught were specially philosophical and legal – like Plato, J.S.Mill, English Constitutional History and Political theory and its history. So that N.S. became later in life a very conscientious citizen. He learnt the Constitutional History and the laws of England with the help of original Tudor and Stuart documents; he studied the Magna Carta\textsuperscript{19} and Reform Acts, so thoroughly that Mckechnie and the author of the multivolume Laws of England\textsuperscript{20} and other authors like Stubbs, Maitland, Lord Bryce and A.V.Dicey became very familiar to him. Liberal thinking from Aristotle to Morley was instilled into him by the wisdom of R.Bhaskaran and the frequent lectures of the Rt.Hon’ble V.S.S.Sastri. Plato’s Republic (for the totalitarian primitive communist ideology) and John Stuart Mill’s On Liberty for modern liberalism were simultaneously studied so that Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx and Laski lost their reverence and Locke and Burke became models. With such ideas being constantly communicated in the classroom and in frequent public lectures, there was no possibility of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{19} The Great charter issued by king John of England.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Laws of England: Holdsworth
\end{itemize}
revolution and violence and breaking of laws becoming respectable to sensitive students like N.S.; in all his books and public speeches this philosophical value could be seen.

The freedom, which the home as well as the University gave him in the matter of choosing and reading any book, he wished to and its easy availability in the library, laid the foundation for the polymath that N.S. later became. So he did not, even while struggling with the Intermediate examination syllabuses, stop with them, but went on to read the 18th and 19th century English novelists from Daniel Defoe to Thomas Hardy with great avidity. But he went even beyond them and familiarized himself with the principles of ancient Greek philosophy and Roman law, the arguments of St.Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Francis Bacon, Newton, Darwin, Marx and Freud - at least in their broad outlines. This foundation was to serve him so well later on and distinguish him as a special kind of thinker: 'offbeat and controversial' as some critics would call it.

N.S.' professional classroom study of History, Economics and Political Science and Constitutional theory was in the background dominated by an intense love of English literature. But then his temper was logical, rational,

21. D.Defoe: The author of Robinson Crusoe and Moll Flanders etc.
22. Thomas Hardy: the author of Tess of the D'urbevilles, Jude the obscure etc.
24. Machiavelli: Italian Political Philosopher and author of 'The Prince', 'History of Florence' etc (16th Century)
25. F.Bacon: English essayist and logician (16th and 17th Century)
26. Newton, Isaac: The greatest physicist, Master of the English Mint, President of the Royal Society and so on (17th and 18th Century)
27. Darwin, Charles: The discoverer of the principle of biological evolution (19th cent), wrote The Origin of the Species.
28. Marx, Karl: The author of Das Kapital; he popularized the communist theory.
29. Freud, S: The founder of Psychoanalysis (19th and 20th cent)
scientific, and politely anti-superstitious (in the field of religion). This means he would insist on, not necessarily ocular, but at least logical proof for all assertions. So he began to read some basic works on anthropology, though then some of them were beyond him. Sir James Frazer\textsuperscript{30} and Sir Havelock Ellis\textsuperscript{31} - at least in parts- he studied and learnt what they were trying to communicate; though to fully understand Frazer, a more thorough knowledge of ancient classical mythology was necessary. But he was not daunted by any of these restrictions, which to others would have been obstacles.

In the meantime, the family tradition and his father’s influence made him get closer and closer to classical Tamil, especially the Śaṅgam poetry. In that respect he was far in advance of his classmates who also did Tamil as a special study.

Because his father was well-known in the world of Tamil scholarship in those days (i.e., from 1900 to 1940) many distinguished Tamil scholars came to visit his father at home; of whom the most distinguished was Pandit Dr.U.V.Swaminatha Aiyar. Another old acquaintance of his father was S.V.V.\textsuperscript{32} who also came to be known to N.S. through his father. On the occasion of the release of the \textit{Parikāthai} by R.Raghava Aiyangar in 1934, numerous eminent Tamil scholars\textsuperscript{33} from all over Tamilnad came to attend the function; and N.S. who was always in the company of his father, also had occasion to know them personally. The Tamil literary atmosphere, which has

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Frazer, Sir J: The author of the \textit{Golden Bough} (1890-1915 in 12 vols) one of the greatest works in cultural anthropology.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Ellis, Henry Havelock: The author of the multi volume \textit{Studies in the Psychology of Sex} (19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} cent)
\item \textsuperscript{32} S.V.V.: S.V.Vijayaraghavachariar, a great Indian contributor to English literature; author of \textit{The Soap Bubbles} etc. (20\textsuperscript{th} cent)
\item \textsuperscript{33} V.M.Gopalakrishnamachariar, P.Lakshmana Pillai, V. P.Subramaniya Mudaliar and many others.
\end{itemize}
had a hallowed influence on him, made him take to serious Tamil studies with the earnestness and avidity of a professional student of Tamil literature.  

N.S.' father retired from University service in 1935 (June) and left for Coimbatore to live with his elder son Muthuswami Aiyar, who as has been said before, was a practising lawyer there. He was doing well as an advocate but the family was growing and he had to maintain N.S. in the University hostel and bear the expenses of educating him.

N.S. did not buy a single textbook for his study but used only the library and his Professors helped him with their table copies of the textbooks. But even then he had the three remarkable habits of

1. taking close notes from every book he read
2. maintaining a diary of his academic work and
3. another diary recording all such matters as seemed important to him.

These habits have persisted till now. After he reached and passed 89 he has not been very punctilious about these but still he has maintained through thick and thin (the letters and other records) of a chequered life; it is remarkable he has made proper arrangements for their maintenance yet.

N.S.’ hostel life was eventless for his ‘bookworm’ friends and his own books were his only concerns, and during summer vacation he would visit Coimbatore for a family reunion. Even then his academic work was not neglected. In the 1936(April- June) vacation he did his Laski’s Grammar of

34. It was only in 1941-42 when his father was with him in Kaverippatnam (Dharmapuri Dist.) that he had occasion to learn his Tamil systematically.

35. Except the Cambridge History of India (Shorter), which had just then been published. The teacher insisted on the pupils buying copies of that book. It cost Rs.30/- then. He bought it by saving money by frequently foregoing his lunch or afternoon refreshment in the hostel.
Politics and Liberty in the Modern State\textsuperscript{36} and wrote a long essay on Laski’s Political Theory. That earned a private prize from the Department of History at the instance of R. Bhaskaran.

Three things interested him while in Annamalai very much; and they still rule his life: music, drama and oratory. C.R. Myleru, the English lecturer was the life and breath of the Annamalai Dramatic club, which once, i.e. in 1931, staged Balarama Aiyar’s \textit{Mattavilāsa Prahasanam}\textsuperscript{37} and did as well as any professional dramatic company. The Music Sabha held regular monthly programmes by the best musicians of those times. These artistic activities influenced N.S. very much. His oratorical and debating skills he could develop to any extent by practice in the University Students’ Union and by example provided by his teachers and particularly the Vice-Chancellor V.S.S Sastri. These three were his passions in his life apart from books. He himself while being a pupil in the High School and later a teacher in the A.M.J.C. played parts in plays. N.S. once summarised one of the speeches of V.S.S. Sastri who spoke on ‘patriotism’ and won a prize of Rs.50/- from him. But he, ever a disbeliever in his good luck, sent the summary in the name of his classmate, who was also put up in the neighboring room in the West Block of the hostel. His friend got a reputation and a monetary award. But N.S. had no regrets. He admitted in his heart of hearts his general literary abilities but had also positive proof of the inexorable state of obscurity and anonymity which in later life also characterized all his enormously good historical and

\textsuperscript{36} Making a comparative study of that supposedly updated work with the basic text ‘On Liberty’ by J.S. Mill, for which he had and still has great reverence. The only thing he approved of Laski was his rejection of the principle of ‘Sovereignty of the Nation State’.

\textsuperscript{37} A Sanskrit play written by the Pallava king Mahendravarman I (7\textsuperscript{th} cent). It was translated into Tamil by N.S’ father - Balarāma Aiyar - at the instance of the History Prof.P.T.Srinivasa Aiyangar.
literary effort. These disheartened him in his later life though he learnt to reconcile himself to the inevitable, knowing the customers he was destined to deal with.

His love of drama made him an unqualified admirer of Greek and Elizebathan drama; particularly tragedy and his own creative works – especially the "Greek Tragedy" in his *Pandora’s Box*, and the *Socrates* and the *Auvaiyār* plays etc in his Tamil works evidence this. He was a conservative in artistic appreciation for he was a classicist in art and a radical in social reform – points which students of his sociological works will not miss.

In 1937 April – May N.S. took his first rank among first class of B.A. Honours degree in History and Politics, and in the annual convocation held in the November of that year he received the degree and a prize from the Rt.Hon’ble V.S.S.Sastri himself.

This was in May 1937. In June, the very next month he was married. When he was not in a position to earn his personal bread, he was put in a position, which meant his earning a family bread. It was lower middle class Tamil Brahmin India of those days. His professor invited him to take up a researcher’s position in the University, but that carried a stipend of Rs 30/ per mensem. He aspired to something more. He wanted to do his I.C.S. Examination, but he could not do so for want of Rs.80 required for the application. So he remained unemployed at home for some time studying Matthew Arnold’s *Essays in criticism* and Carlyle’s *Letters of Oliver*.

38. With a smile, which might mean, anything, he once remarked that it was his Karṇa’s curse (Karṇa Sābam)
39. G.D.H.Cole’s *Intelligent man’s guide to world chaos* and Galsworthy’s *End of the chapter* were his prize books; he preserves them still.
Cromwell (4 volumes) and similar works and assiduously writing his diary full of pessimistic statements of all kinds. A whole year, 1938 – 39, he spent in Madras trying to secure some job, any job. But all avenues were closed. Some said he was too highly qualified for simple clerical jobs and they had nothing else to offer. In 1939 he got selected for a clerical job (the irony of it) by the Madras Public Service Commission; and he was posted as a clerk in the office of the Registrar of Assurances, Coimbatore, where, as said before, his father (who drew no pension) was living with his first son. His salary was Rs 30 per mensem – a salary he despised a year earlier. That was one of the wrong choices he (or his elders in the family on his behalf) made in his life. It was to have permanent consequences in his life. Initially it was painful for him to think of his having read so studiously his Plato and his Maitland, just for the sake of wasting his time copying documents in sub-registry offices in obscure semi-urban centres where scholars and libraries and learned company were just non-existent. A nearly static salary and a growing family with no family property to fall back upon must have broken the spirit of any man but an N.S. He defied adversity, became accustomed to and even friendly with poverty, went to his books again and studied for the Vidvān (Tamil) title examination of the Madras University. That University had a regulation that only those who had crossed 30 years were eligible to take up the examination. So he waited. In 1947 he took his final Vidvān examination and passed it - all by personal and private efforts without the aid of libraries or teachers. He had learnt from his father some classics, but not all. The rest he did by himself. In 1945 his B.A. (Hons) degree had by lapse of time become the Master’s Degree; and he was now (during 1939-1950) for 12 years a drudge in what was to him the most uninspiring office imaginable; managing in the mean time to retain his love for study of books and to try not to give up hope, which proverbially keeps up one’s spirits. Even while in that office he never lost an opportunity to teach the Tamil he knew to those who aspired to learn. Thus in
Peranamallur in North Arcot District in 1948 he taught Kuruntogai to a batch of teachers and in 1949-50 in Pollachi he taught many classics to a larger number of teachers (who were taking their M.A. or Vidvān examinations after private study.) These efforts did not add to his income but reduced his boredom. His knowledge of Tamil and his University I class degree in History and Politics, Economics etc came to be known but without any monetarily useful consequence. By April 1950 there came a break. T.S.Avinasilingam Chettiar of Coimbatore was the Minister for Education in the Congress Government of that time; and he having heard about N.S.‘ academic attainments and total incompatibility with the job he was then holding, invited him to join the office of the Tamil Encyclopaedia functioning under the auspices of the Tamil Academy run by the Education Minister in his personal capacity. M.P. Periasamy Thooran was the Chief Editor and there were already a Joint Editor and two Assistant Editors in charge of different subjects; and N.S. was given an appointment there to look after the articles relating to humanities. So N.S. resigned his 12 years old Government job and became a member of the staff of an academic body. He stayed there for but three years from June1950 to June 1953, when he applied for and obtained the position of a lecturer in History in the A.M.J.C., which was then in T’Nagar, Madras. Mr. S.Narasimhan who was the Principal of the college was pleased with N.S. and did not mind his age which was then 37+ a rather advanced age for a person to begin teaching in a college. He left college in 1937 March as a student and entered it as a teacher in 1953 – the interval was enough for any head of a college to think many times and finally say no to an applicant who was as old as 37. In fact Prof.P.Mahadevan of the Madura College, Madurai

40. Before then while in a hamlet called Puduchatram lying between Rasipuram and Namakkal, he had taught a few Tamil classics to a batch of weaver merchants in Aiyampudur, interested in Tamil studies.

41. He was Prof. of English and had just then retired from the Rajamundry Government College.
had once told him that. But Principal S. Narasimhan was a strange and eccentric (in the original and complimentary sense of the term) a person as N.S. himself; and they agreed to try each other. For four years they made the experiment, measured each other and each found the other indispensable. Later on Narasimhan wrote to say in a testimonial:

"........I have found him to be a teacher of rare ability and integrity... In building up the A.M.Jain college from its inception, I have relied on his hard work and co-operation in several capacities, as Secretary of the College Council, Lecturer in charge of the library, Co-editor of the college Magazine, Honorary Member of the College Students' Unions, and other miscellaneous activities too numerous to mention........"42. The Principal entrusted him with all kinds of academic work apart from class work, which came to nearly 16 hours a week. But N.S. is very grateful to him for having been so kind a master who took pains to teach him the technique of managing educational institutions, discipline and routine academic administration and even the secrets of successful teaching. N.S. keeps his portrait in his Library hall as a measure of his permanent gratitude to the man who gave him a helping hand in life, when all others had failed him. Prof. Narasimhan's successor as Principal of the AMJC, A.L. Krishnan43 was not much different from his predecessor. He was equally kind and had an equally high opinion about N.S' academic work, teaching and all allied activities. While in Government service, which N.S. gave up for two reasons; viz; the increasing rate and volume of corruption in the lower orders of the Government hierarchy and the sheer boredom the concerned official work entailed, he learnt two important lessons: 1. To be punctual and prompt in his duties and in an ability to deal

42. From testimonial by S.Narasimhan to N.S., given when the former retired from the A.M.J.C.
43. Mr. A.L. Krishnan was Professor of English in the Loyola College, Madras, before becoming Principal of A.M.J.C.
with the public of all sorts in the required manner. He himself personally remained incorruptible but could do nothing about the rising tide of corruption of all sorts all around him. Further, he was obliged to learn certain ‘statutory’ laws of Government which stood him in good stead in understanding and communicating international legal constitutional issues of which the average citizen was unfortunately ignorant.

While in the Kalaikkalanjyam office he had the office as well as the University Library in addition to the other well-known city libraries which fed him with such a variety of information and criticism and on so many subjects that when he was later on well entrenched in teaching service at much higher levels he was always well prepared to meet any academic or pedagogic challenge; and could do acknowledgedly successfully as a teacher and compose internationally read articles and write a century of books of more or less uniform importance. While in the college since 1953 he learnt the art of successful teaching to large or small groups of pupils in such a way that for very many long years his pupils still remembered those days of his inspired teaching. The co-operation and help of his principals helped him learn many different aspects of college administration. While working in the Kalaikkalanjyam and in the AMJC he was active also as an author, partly out of financial necessity and partly also of a desire to do serious work as an author of books suited for school children as well as for serious adult scholars. He had already enough experience as an author while serving as a Sub Registrar in Pollachi (1949-50). He had written the Kuttikkatturaiatal and the life of V.G.Suryanarayana Sastriar in Tamil; and while in Madras where he arrived in June 1950, within a year he began writing small books, intended as

44. Like the Registration Act, the Stamp Act, the Transfer of Property Act, Evidence Act, Negotiable Instruments Act, the laws of contract as well as the procedure codes. His brother who was a lawyer helped him much in the proper understanding of these Acts.
models of Tamil prose, for High School students with a view to supplementing his meagre income. The first such book he wrote was the Pulavar Manigal (gems among poets) about a 100 printed pages long, which he sold to an old friend and publisher in Triplicane, Madras. The manuscript was sold for Rs.30/- It went through several editions but the author's financial position was none the better for it. Till 1955-56 he was engaged only in this kind of authorship work. There were a few exceptions. He edited Ānandaraṅgan Kōvai\(^45\) for the Madras Oriental Manuscript library; and wrote the Man and his world\(^46\) for the students of the pre-university class. He wrote two books on political science for the undergraduate students; and an Introduction to the Cultural History of India for the B.Sc., students who were then obliged to do some non-science subject as a 'minor' part of their Part-III syllabus. So by the time he wrote his Indiya Varalāṟu (Part-I) for the N.C.B.H. Madras in 1964 he was a well-trained and experienced author whose writings in English as well as in Tamil were recognized, approved and appreciated.\(^47\)

Creative writing, which his imaginative mind encouraged and created, had even in 1950 induced him to write the Kuttikkatturaigał (short essays - on general subjects - a game unfamiliar to local writers). But when he was in the

\(^{45}\) Written by Thyagaraja Desikar of the 18\(^{th}\) Century; N.S.' father had written a commentary on it; this work was published by N.S. while he was very busy with his official tutorial work in the college.

\(^{46}\) A small but lucid exposition of the History of the World.

\(^{47}\) So that his Ph.D., official guide Prof. R.Sathyanatha Aiyar said that since he (the candidate) was an accomplished writer himself and had learnt the carefully chosen subject (the Śaṅgam Polity) from his father during his Tamil studies, he would do his work all by himself and there would be no need for him either to guide him in regard to the material content of the thesis nor revise its language. He would just be the candidate's administrative guide.
early 50s serving in the AMJC he wrote a few short stories\textsuperscript{48}, which later were included in his short story vol. \textit{Uma} (1992). While mentioning his early creative works, it may be noted that when he was Sub-Registrar, Puduchatram (Salem District) he began composing some of the verses of the Gāndhi Pillai Tamil which is one of the best known of his Tamil poetical works; and later when he was in Hanur (1948) he wrote the elegy on Gandhi’s death; and a satirical poem on his experiences there\textsuperscript{49}. When he left the AMJC in 1959, therefore, he had already had experience in writing children’s books, biography of a scholar, original creative essays and short stories and verses; edition of an old Tamil classic, an English book on World History, Political Science texts for undergraduate students and an early attempt at writing cultural history. Before he left Madras for Madurai the opportunity at the former University gave him 1. the chance to publish his long term research work - the \textit{Pre-Pallavan Index}, 2. publish his Ph.D. thesis, \textit{The Śaṅgam Polity} and above all to get published by the Institute of Traditional Cultures, Madras - \textit{The Hindu Tripod}, an epoch- making essay of just 65 pages but indicative of the essential sociological thinking of N.S. He also led a seminar on Historiography (1.2.1962) under the auspices of the same Institute;\textsuperscript{50} it was a pathbreaking attempt at historical theorizing of considerable importance and consequence, much of the material in the booklet was incorporated in his learned book on \textit{Historiography} he wrote in Madurai in 1973. That session and the question hour that followed and his successful responses established him as one of the best seminar leaders in the conferences of learned bodies. He attended and greatly benefited by the month-long Conference on Modern

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Avan onru minaiyka} was published in the Swadēsamitran weekly (7.9.1952); \textit{Subbaiyā Saída Pāvam} found a place in the A.M.J.C. Magazine 1954, and \textit{Dīpāvalīpparīsā} and \textit{Sāmartyattiruttu} were published in \textit{Polfachivāsi} on 14.11.1955 and January 1955 respectively.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Kaqnarūr Vattirai}: now included in the \textit{Pāmalai}, first collection of his Tamil poems. N.S. states it will find a place in the collected Tamil poems of N.S: \textit{NaŚu vin Kavithaigal}.

\textsuperscript{50} K.A. Nilakanta Sastri, the then Director of the Institute presided over the Seminar.
Indian Social History held in Kodaikanal during 6.6.1963 to 3.7.1963 and to that seminar he contributed a paper on 'Caste in the Tamil Country'\textsuperscript{51} which showed his interest in research on the Hindu social order.

After six to seven years of college teaching, early in the year 1959 he obtained his Ph.D. degree (as an external candidate) from the Annamalai University.\textsuperscript{52} He was then selected as lecturer in history by the University of Madras, where he served till June 1970, first as lecturer till 1967 and then as Reader till June 1970; then he left Madras for the Madurai University\textsuperscript{53} as Professor of Ancient History, when the P.G course was started there.

In Madurai he served as Prof. of Ancient History for six years from June 1970 to June 1976. There he taught the P.G. students and did some research himself besides guiding research scholars to their Ph.D., and M.Litt., degrees. During the six years stay in Madurai, his powers of untiring P.G. teaching, guidance of Ph.D., research, the quality and quantity of his own published works, his reputation as a public speaker and the widespread recognition of N.S. as a man of integrity - all in spite of extraordinary and unspeakable difficulties and hostilities he had to meet and overcome for various non-academic reasons in the campus, earned for him the gratitude of his devoted students, acceptance as a scholar - extraordinary by his colleagues and an admirable scholarly orator by an informed public. He then published his *History of Tamilnad Vol.I, Historiography, and Hindu Tripod and Other*

\textsuperscript{51} This is now included in *the Hindu Tripod and other Essays* (1976)

\textsuperscript{52} It required the extraordinary legal insight of Sir C.P.Ramasami Aiyar (1956), then the Vice-Chancellor of the Annamalai University to permit N.S. to do his Ph.D., research as an external candidate in a residential University. As a mark of gratitude to that legal, administrative, educational luminary, Sir C.P.'s portrait adorns the walls of N.S' home library.

\textsuperscript{53} At that time the University in Madurai had not yet been christened Madurai Kamaraj University.
Essays, edited with commentary on the poems of the Saṅgam Tamil poet Paraṉar, and published the life and poems of his father Balarama Aiyar.

While at the University of Madras as but a lecturer—the lowest cadre in the Faculty—he had experience of non-university academic work of the like of which, either qualitatively or quantitatively does not fall normally to the lot of many in such small positions. He had occasion not only to come in contact with such eminent historians like K.A.N. Sastri, T.G. Aravamudha Aiyangar (a lawyer to whom history and archaeology were hobbies) and I. Mahadevan I.A.S., (a civilian officer who has become an authority on the Indus Valley script) Dr. S.P. Sen (the founder of the Institute of Historical studies, Calcutta) Dr. H.D. Sankaliya of Pune, the well-known archaeologist, Mr. T.N. Ramachandran and many others far too numerous to mention; but had become very friendly (personally and professionally) with such foreign scholars like Mr. Karashima of Japan, Mr. Burton Stein of Philadelphia, Dr. J.D.M. Derrett of the SOAS London, Mr. Herbert Herring then the Director of the Max Muller Bhavan, Madras and Prof., R.S. Sharma of Patna University and so on. He was also in frequent requisition by the cultural units associated with those foreign embassies, besides many local cultural bodies like the YMCA, the LYMA, the Rotary Clubs, and so on; and in view of his ability to express himself well in English, there was not a college in Madras whose students’ and Teachers’ Unions which failed to ask him to speak to them. He once addressed the Madras chapter of the Sarvodaya organization when Mr. Jayaprakash Narayan, the famous Congress Socialist leader presided. N.S. was a star speaker on the occasion of the Gandhi Centenary symposium held in the Max Muller Bhavan, Madras, in October 1969. Distinguished scholars like Prof. C. D. S. Devanesan (who later became the Vice-Chancellor of the NEHU, Shillong), Mr. Nirmal Kumar Bose (a close associate of Gandhi), Mr. C. Badrinath, I.A.S., then the Collector of Madras and a few
other scholars of eminence participated. N.S. made such an impact on the audience which packed a large hall, that more than three decades later, i.e., in 1991-92, Dr. Herring wrote in his Foreword to the *Essays in Sociology and Politics* of N.S., very clearly recalling what happened so many years ago\(^5\).

*The Hindu Tripod* to which reference has been made earlier had impressed many important scholars.

In Madras (during 1960-1970 June) N.S. was as much engaged in public and other collegiate academic activities as being concerned with his regular routine research and teaching work at the University. On 67 occasions, at least, he was engaged in giving public lectures to students and other learned audiences in Madras and elsewhere. Of these some were of prime importance. Between 1960 and June 1970 he delivered 17 very important lecturers, which included the Gandhi Centenary symposium in Madras and the SOAS lecture in an international conference in London both in 1969.

Further he gave academic help to two American scholars on matters of some importance to them. That is, in August 1961 he researched and found out information about Brett’s Folly (the Collectors’ bungalow) in Hosur, for Joseph A. Horne of the USIS, Madras\(^5\). Then he helped Prof. Frederick

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54. Dr. H. Herring wrote “.........more than twenty years ago, to be exact on 17th October 1969, as the Director of MaxMuller Bhavan, Madras (the Indo-German cultural Institute) I conducted a seminar on *Gandhi and Social Change*. Among the participants were two who particularly attracted the attention of the audience, by their factual knowledge as well as by their lucid success of verbal communication. One was N.K. Bose, Mahatma Gandhi’s Secretary... the other one was N.S then Reader in History, University of Madras whose controversial book *The Hindu Tripod* (1965) had captured my interest when working in the field of comparative philosophy”.

Clothey of the Philadelphia University, U.S.A., translate the *Tirumurugāṟṟuppadai* into English.\(^{56}\)

Of all the research works he has done he may be specially credited with the production of the *Śaṅgam Polity* (a work on the governmental and the social polities of the ancient Tamils) and the *Hindu Tripod* (a Hindu sociological work). If consequence is the sole criterion of the importance of the academic work of any piece of scholarly writing, these two stand foremost among N.S.' writings. But if intrinsic merit, utility, originality, wealth of material and critical comments are also criteria, as they ought to be, many more will be included in this short list.\(^{57}\)

*Hindu Tripod*, which Dr. J. D. M. Derrett of the SOAS London had read, persuaded SOAS to arrange a conference on 'Indian Tradition' in London, in June 1969, to discuss the matter the Tripod discusses, in greater detail. A number of scholars from the UK, the U.S.A. Canada, Europe and Pakistan and India were invited to participate in the conference. Only two were invited from India: N.S. and Andre Beteille of Bengal. N.S. presented a paper on that occasion; 'Hindu responses to Medieval and Modern western challenges'.

N.S.' visit to London was a turning point in his life. In fact there were many important and substantially consequential turning points in his life; to mention only those which were for the better: 1. His changing his college optional special subjects from the sciences to the histories at the Intermediate level (1933); 2. his choosing Government service in a Registry office in 1939;

\(^{56}\) *Vide* his detailed bio-data, 4th entry for 1967. Fred Clothey met N.S again in Madurai a decade later when the former was engaged in doing some research on Aiyanār, a village deity of Tamilnad.

\(^{57}\) *Like, eg. Tamil Social History (3 vols.) Historiography* (1st edition), *Psychohistory of C.Subramania Bharati*, and his creative writings - prose as well as verse. These are only samples. The list would extend to more than 50 works.
3. his resignation from that service and taking up the Sub-Editorship in the Kalaikkalanjiam Office (1950); 4. his choice as lecturer in history in the AMJC, Madras; 5. the acceptance of his application for Ph.D., research as an external candidate by the Annamalai University; 6. his appointment as lecturer in history in the Madras University (1959 Dec); 7. his selection as Reader in History in the Madras University (1967); 8. his selection as delegate to the SOAS conference in London in June 1969; 9. his selection as Prof. of Ancient History in 1970 by the Madurai University; 10. his inclusion as a founding Executive Committee member by S.P. Sen in the Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta in 1972; 11) his inclusion as a founding member of the MIDS, Adayar, Madras; 12) his appointment as Professor of History and Academic Director PETC, NEHU, Shillong; 13) his inclusion in the ICHR in 1979; 14. his Institution of the INITHS, being the Editor of its journal the Tamil Studies and founding of the Ennes Publications in Madurai after his retirement from Shillong in July 1979. All these were deciding factors in his progress in life. But of course, the final decision, which is apart from the rest, is his decision to withdraw the INITHS, close down the Tamil studies, leave Madurai and settle down in Udumalpet for the rest of his life.

The progress, however, though steady and slow, was decisive and helpful. The publication of his major works from the Sahgam Polity (1965) Tamil Social History (3 vols) (1977-2001) were further landmarks in his academic career though the Hindu Tripod and other Essays, Essays in Sociology and politics, Psychobiography of C.Subramania Bhārati etc. will for ever remain points of considerable historical - literary importance in his professional activities. The stay for twenty years in Madras laid the solid foundation for his further academic career. That the Alliance Francaise chose him to deliver the address on the occasion of the centennial celebration marking the

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58. Here rest, so far as N.S. goes, does not mean relaxation and vacant meditation, but the remainder of his life.
publication of Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* was a matter of which he feels genuinely proud; for more than one reason; 1. the book is his favourite; and 2. he was then only a lecturer in the faculty of History. He was preferred to more senior men in the faculties of literature or history.

While serving in the University of Madras, he attended many Indian conferences too as a delegate of the University. He attended the philosophy conference held in 1961 in Annamalainagar; attended as the University delegate, the annual meeting of the Historical Records Commission held in Patna in 1964, December and the Bhagalpur session of the Indian History Congress which was held nearby and soon after. He attended the II International Tamil Conference held in the University buildings, Madras, as a University delegate. He participated and spoke in a meet at the Madras Archives - the discussion was on ‘Survey of Historical Records’. He attended and presented a paper in the annual conference of the Institute of Historical Studies (Calcutta) held in Bangalore; and on the last day he spoke on ‘Historical writings on Nationalist Movement in Tamilnadu’. This was in November 1969. Dr. Poddar of Pune presided over the conference. 1969 was a year of hectic academic activity for N.S. It looked as if the ground for his elevation to a higher and more responsible post was being elaborately prepared.

On the 20th December, 1966 he, under the leadership of Professor R. Bhaskaran addressed the students of the Syracuse University brought to Madras by Prof. Isenberg. The occasion was important because the audience hugely appreciated the capacity of the two Indians addressing to coin telling phrases; e.g., Bhaskaran in the course of his opening remarks said that 1. ‘the best government need not be good government’; and later N.S. said referring to the question of ‘brain drain’ from India, ‘the return of the native is a hardy problem’. More than 20 years later when N.S., once met Prof. Isenberg in the
Higginbotham's bookstall, the latter reminded him of those unforgettable phrases; he remarked that 'Master and Pupil' (meaning Bhashkaran and N.S.) were master phrasemakers.

In 1968 N.S. was requested by Dr.V.Raghavan of the Sanskrit Department of the University, on behalf of a Committee, to deliver the Krishnaswami Rao Endowment lecture for that year; and N.S. agreeing, spoke on two days, under the presidency of Prof.T.M.P.Mahadevan, on 'the Brahmin in the Tamil country- till the end of the Vijayanagar period'. He went on two college Inspection Commissions before 1965 - one to Salem Municipal College and the other to the Trichy Bishop Heber's College (1960). The decade he spent at the University mostly as a lecturer and for just a couple of years as a Reader saw him attending many conferences and seminars on behalf of the University and also participate in the International conference held in London in June 1969.

It was in 1953 that he gave his first Radio (AIR) talk in Madras; he spoke on Sven Hedin, the explorer. Thereafter he was regularly connected with that Broadcasting organization, till 1995. The last lecture was on Koṅgu Nāṭṭu Varalāru Varaiviyal (June 1995).

There were two important occasions relating to his connection with the Madras Radio lectures; these in their respective capacities show his independent nature and a tendency not to compromise on certain principles, which he deemed right, and correct; and his vast scholarship. On 31.12.1964, a speech by him was on, 'royal paraphernalia in ancient Tamil Polity'. The Programme Director had perused N.S.' paper on royal paraphernalia and got a doubt which he expressed when N.S. met him at the studio before the live

59. MP.Somasundaram was the regional Programme Director then, in Madras. He was a scholar in Tamil.
broadcast. N.S. had said in his paper what he had already stated in another context i.e., ‘the term Vendan (ntej;\) is derived from Veidal- (to wear); Vendan is he who wears (the crown); e.g., Konr\ai Vendan. N.S. immediately cited Konr\ai Vendan as an example. Evidently the Director got the answer to what he thought was too tough a question for the speaker. Thereafter he developed for N.S. a regard and esteem, which further increased when he heard N.S. speak on ‘Tamilil Varal\rrukkalai’ in the Madras Memorial Hall (Park Town); on that occasion C.Rajagopalachariar, presided and BharatiDasan, M.P.Sivanana Gramani and many others were present. N.S. spoke on the pitfalls in the art of translation of foreign historical classics like Gibbon and Trevelyan into Tamil and made challenging suggestions for the improvement of the current situation, when anybody who could put pen to paper is asked to translate tough English Classics like Maitland and Bury.

It was in 1968 December, that he was asked by the AIR Madras to present a feature programme, lasting for 15 minutes, on ‘1857 - the First War of Indian Independence’ and sent along with this offer a few guidelines; one of them was that N.S. should entitle 1857 Mutiny as ‘The First war of Indian Independence’. N.S. requested the Director to withdraw the guidelines and give him freedom to deal with and entitle the theme as ‘he knew and pleased’; that he did not want his history to be taught him by a government agency. The Director tried his persuasive best to convince N.S. of the need, officially required, to accept the guidelines. Relentlessly N.S. declined to do the programme; though he was not above the need for the remuneration, which the AIR would give. This stubbornness still persists in the ‘man that is N.S.’. His polite refusal to participate in what he deems wrong has become proverbial in the profession.

In 1965 N.S. presented a portrait of R. Bhaskaran, his old master, to the University of Madras in a function presided over by Sir A.L. Mudaliar, the Vice-Chancellor. Throughout his life, till now, N.S. has insisted on the supreme virtue of gratitude and the extreme wickedness of ingratitude.

N.S. had on numerous occasions in his life taught (without taking any remuneration, of course) a number of teacher-scholars who were facing higher-level examinations in Tamil - Vidvān or Pandit or M.A. In that regard he followed the footsteps of his father and his preceptor. During 1968, July-September, he delivered 12 lectures on Modern Governments for the M.A., Public Administration students of the Graduates’ Guild, Madras in the Bharathiya Vidya Bhavan premises in Mylapore, Madras and the Local Library Authority buildings on the Mount Road now known as ‘Aṇṇāsālai’, Madras.

On 5.12.1969 N.S. got up a meeting of professors of History in the city in his room at the University to form a History Teachers’ Association. The Association was formed. It lasted till he remained in Madras; i.e., it perished after June 1970 when he left for Madurai.

His arrival in Madurai in June 1970 began a new era of academic life for him; for one thing he was now head of a faculty; secondly he drew up an unprecedentedly new kind of syllabus for the History P.G. students by introducing 1. Historiography’ and 2. the whole of the History of Tamilnad’ as compulsory subjects. Till then historiography as a discipline was never taught anywhere in India. He not only introduced the subject but also taught them himself and wrote the first full-fledged books on them. The first edition of his book on Historiography is the standard one (1973). Dr. S.K. Aiyangar and K.A.N. Sastri set the pattern for writing about Tamilnad as but a part of South India and never an autonomous unit. N.S. himself taught only South
Indian History in Madras. So an entirely new school of History was being started in Madurai University in 1970 June. There was another department, which looked after Modern History.

A research scholar was guided by him, to her Ph.D., and three others for their M.Litt degrees. Whatever research he did was on his own account and not as part of University official schedule. He taught a number of U.S. students who had come from Chicago, both for their M.A., course (Part) syllabus and guided two of them to their Ph.D. degree.

N.S. stayed in Madurai for six years from June 1970 to June 1976. It was a period of mixed feelings and achievements for him; it was a time when man tried to ruin him, but destiny saved him - for he has always believed that ‘a man’s character is his destiny’. It was a period of domestic fulfillments and official uncertainties. But it is marvellous to see how under these conflicting circumstances he still was busy with his high level of academic work as not only Professor and Head in his faculty but also a member of the Senate, Academic council, Board of Studies, Board of Examiners, Chairman of the Matriculation Board and so forth. That was a time also when he began writing textbooks for postgraduate students and engage in other academic publications.

N.S. had an insatiable tendency to form associations of scholars interested in the subjects dear to him - History and literature. In the AMJC he was the Secretary of the Teachers’ Association he founded. In Madurai Faculty Association, which has become well - known as MUFA\textsuperscript{61} he was unanimously chosen as the President. He was President till 1976 June when he left for Shillong.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} Madurai University Faculty Association.

\textsuperscript{62} In that capacity he was a member of the Annamalai University Academic Council.
A few academic enterprises he got himself involved in met with failure for no fault of his, nor of his sponsors. Prof. K.A.N. Sastri was asked by the Ministry of Education, Government of India to write a few chapters for a large book on Indian History. It included the Gupta period. An honorarium was promised. K.A.N. Sastri sought N.S.’ help on the understanding that the honorarium would be equitably shared.

But for some financial reason or other, the Government of India had given up the project and withdrawn the offer. In the meantime K.A.N. and N.S. had done a lot of work on the subject. But all that went to waste. For N.S. it was not the loss of money but the opportunity for his recognition being lost that mattered.

Again, it is known that K.A.N. had written a three volume History of India which was published by S.Viswanathan and Co., Madras. The second of the 3 vols. dealing with the Muslim period was to be reprinted and the author said he had the permission of the publisher to revise the volume and to seek another scholar’s help in that regard. K.A.N. asked N.S. again this time to revise the volume for him for his eyesight, due to declining age was failing him. In this case also an honorarium was promised but N.S. consented not due to the lure of the honorarium but to the respect he had for KAN and the prospect of helping a great scholar. N.S. did the revision to the entire satisfaction of KAN; though he found that in some parts of the work some changes were required. These changes were boldly made by the younger scholar, but KAN was greatly pleased. But the publisher informed the author that no honorarium would be paid, but that only a mere revision was called for. KAN. retained the corrected version with himself and informed the publisher to reprint the volume as it originally stood. The benefit of a needed revision was thus held back. Such were the quirks of fate in the life of N.S.
which brought him work, sweat and tears and sleepless nights and anxious
days - but no material benefit, though he needed such help very much then.

Very different was the nature of the academic life N.S. had to lead in
Madurai for 6 years from June 1970 to June 1976. Those six years provided
opportunities and challenges unknown to him till then, in University, College
or Government service. In the academic world he gained an institutional as
well as public popularity, which was somewhat unique and even
unprecedented to some extent.

The general academic atmosphere in Madurai could brook no
comparison to what he was accustomed to in Madras. But on the whole it was
a mixed fare of prosperity and adversity, which he lived on during his stay
there. His position as Prof. and head of a faculty gave him a status, which
initially counted for much. But the department was an entirely P.G. teaching
department and the university did not insist on teachers showing proof of their
research work in addition to any teaching they might be called upon to do. In
Madurai it was all teaching; but he had a band of pupils, through the six years,
of whom any teacher could be proud. Compared to Madras, it has to be
admitted that the pupils had less library facilities and less academic exposure.
But the earnestness of the students could never be doubted by the most
exacting of teachers. N.S. delighted in teaching; holding classes for hours
together; very often - at least thrice a week he had to address other audiences,
public and college within Madurai and elsewhere in the south. Though
stationed in Madurai his involvement in Madras academic life still continued.
For he attended numerous All-India conferences and was a founding member
of the MIDS established by Dr. Adiseshaiah, who was of the opinion that,
though MIDS was essentially interested in economic problems, a historian of
N.S.’ stature was not only welcome but needed to keep the balance of outlook
even among humanistic scholars. N.S. was the only historian whom
economists, legists and political scientists and literary men wished to hear and consult; for he was not only well informed in all the academic disciplines allied to history but also he had his original views, which came to others as fresh breeze. His thoughts restrained ideological, committed, superficial, narrow, unidisciplinary thinking and theorizing. Hence, his popularity among the scholars in allied disciplines. His activities during this period could be summarized as that 'he spoke more than he wrote and more thought than spoke.'

There, N.S. still became a full-fledged author not necessarily writing to earn his bread but to propound his ideas to a world larger than the classroom. Hence in 1972 began his authorship endeavours with the first vol. of the *History of Tamilnad*. His *History of Tamilnad* vol. I was followed up in 1973 by *Historiography* (a subject he specialized in by consulting more than a 100 works and articles on the subject), which, greatly benefited his students and served as an example to writers of similar works elsewhere in India. He was mainly (if not solely) responsible for making that theoretical, philosophical aspect of history familiar to Indian historians. It was not mere quantification, but philosophy. Then he came out with an edition of the collected poems of Parāṇar the Šahgam poet and provided a commentary and historical introduction to it for the benefit of the Tamil P.G.students as well as to Tamil scholars in general. Then he published in the centenary year (1975) of his father’s birth, a collection of his father’s poems to which he prefixed a 100 page biography of his father and to some extent all his known ancestors.

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63. *vide* Boswell: *Life of Doctor Johnson*

64. In 1950-51 he wrote the biography of his father’s teacher V.G.Suryanarayana Sastriar and in 1976 he published the biography of his father. So he got interested and trained in the art of literary biography.
It was in 1976 that he collected many of his sociological essays - like the *Hindu Tripod* and similar essays, put them all together and published the collection with a foreword from Dr. J.D.M. Derrett of the SOAS, London University.

Mrs. and Mr. Bach of the British council, Madras, and Mr. Stephen Wolpert\(^{65}\), of California University visited his house in Madurai on 16.2.76 and exchanged very interesting views. Mr. Wolpert gave him a complimentary copy of his *Error in Judgement*.

In Madurai, N.S. also guided research scholars and taught foreign students. Two foreign women students did their Ph.D., research with him and he helped a number of students from Chicago, Illinois do part of their M.A., curriculum in Madurai. As used to be the case in Madras, in Madurai also he was on Commissions of Inspection of certain colleges: e.g.: the Palani Andavar College of Indian Culture and the Lady Doak College, Madurai. Of all the colleges it was the Madura College where he spoke most. His official duties as member of the Senate, Academic Councils of two Universities (Madurai and Annamalai), and Boards of Studies and of Examiners, Chairmanship of the Matriculation Board etc. added to the strain of his P.G. teaching work, authorship endeavours and public engagements; for he took all his duties seriously.

He conducted successfully a Pandiyan History Seminar in 1971 and a large number of South Indian Historical scholars assembled, presented papers and held discussions and enhanced the importance of the conference, which lasted for three days. Even in 1970 he had conducted the centenary celebration of his father’s preceptor V.G.S. Sastriar; it was presided over by

\(^{65}\) Wolpert is the famous author of *Nine hours to Rama* dealing with the last few days of Gandhi’s death. He has also written remarkable works on *Tilak and Gokhale* and on *Jawaharlal Nehru*. 
the Vice-Chancellor T.P. Meenakshisundaranar; and N.S. presented a portrait of V.G.S. to the Madras Christian College where V.G.S. had served 100 years ago. On that occasion of the celebration in Madurai, N.S. brought out a valuable souvenir, which consists of a number of valuable articles from great scholars.

One of the most important of his public speaking activities in Madurai was the series of seven lectures he delivered in a public hall in the city of Madurai. The lectures were arranged by his friends, general readers and pupils who wished to hear him on some general topic of permanent importance to the intellectual interested in moral Philosophy. He gave seven lectures on Human Predicament (of different kinds) during the 3rd to the 12th of August 1975. It earned him not only the reputation of being the best speaker in English in those parts, but he also secured a name for sobriety and originality of thought and fluency of expression. The organisers of the lectures even collected a fee at the gate for admission to the venue of the lectures. The lectures had a permanent impact at least on a number of those who attended. The hall was always packed during the lectures. The question hour that usually followed showed another aspect of N.S.’ intellectual gifts; readiness of expression and unfailing and disarming as well as witty answers to even knotty questions. These lectures were delivered in 1975. N. Sakthivelan, Professor of English, Thyagaraja College, Madurai, (who seems to have attended the lectures) wrote as follows: “.........some kind of a mental flash - a high order lecture series in which rare and refreshingly bold lightning flashes on expediency, contingency and necessity in the process called

66. They were 1. Principle Vs. expediency; 2. Self Vs. the other - the golden rule; 3. Safety Vs. risk; Security Vs. freedom; 4. Pleasure Vs. pain; 5. Fair Vs. Unfair; fair Vs. dark; 6. The possible Vs. the desirable.
history, an honest, off the conventional and clear stand, Philosophically sustained - impressions flashing across the mind". 67

It would be appropriate to mention here the state of his family when he left for Madurai on retirement, for Shillong (Meghalaya) to take up a postretirement contract Professorship of History in the North Eastern Hill University there. C.D.S.Devanesen who was formerly Principal of the Madras Christian College, was the first Vice-Chancellor of that University intended mainly for the tribal population there. He requested N.S. to help him organize P.G. studies in History in that University. N.S. was willing and he went there to take up that job, atleast for three years from June 1976. At Shillong he was not only Professor of History but also Academic Director of the Pre (IAS) Examination Training Centre for the tribal candidates.

In June 1937, just a couple of months after he had taken his B.A., (Hons) degree, he was married to a girl from Salem. By the time he left Government service in 1950 he had five children and his last child, a girl, was born in 1951. On a salary of Rs.240/- per mensem, to live a reasonably decent domestic life in Madras, even in those days, must have been beyond the wit of man. So he took to writing books for publishers; small ones for school children, to earn his fast slimming bread and the rest to secure a place among scholarly writers in Tamilnad. That was a time when he in his simplicity of heart believed that merit and achievement would automatically be recognized by a literate educated society. He lost his father in 1943 and his mother in 1944; and what was a serious blow to him was the passing away in 1953 January of his only elder brother Muthuswami; who had 9 children-4 daughters and five sons, of whom the first three were daughters. He had married off two of his daughters in 1952. But unfortunately he passed away

in 1953 of a cardiac attack. The large family he left behind had to be taken care of, brought up, girls married off and boys educated. The reestablishment of that shattered family took many years; though now all is mended and the hard old days are all gone and they are well off. But in the meantime, in between 1953 and 1956 he had to maintain a large family now consisting of 9 children besides himself and his wife. The financial problems daily facing the conscientious and ambitious academic are past even imagination in those days. With fortitude, which has become proverbial in the family he carried on.

In Madurai he got his own two daughters married and well settled in life. His first son became a lecturer in History in the Tagore Arts College in Pondicherry. The second became a Civil Engineer and took service with the Government of India in Shillong; the third one became a veterinarian and the fourth had his graduation in the Presidency College, Madras and eventually became the proprietor of a book publishing House (Ennes Publications). Today all his children are married and well on their way to becoming senior citizens themselves, for now NS is 90.

N.S. served the NEHU for three years i.e. till June 1979, when he voluntarily declined the invitation of the Vice-Chancellor (in a private talk) to continue as Professor for some years more; for he told the V.C that he had to attend to unfinished family agenda. N.S.'experience in Shillong as the senior most professor in the University and a respected citizen of the hill station was entirely different from what it had been earlier, either in the academic world or still earlier in the bureaucratic world. This would apply specially to Madurai. For the geographical, social and academic climates in Shillong were all so refreshingly different and encouraging and conducive to such healthy and sustained teaching and research that he earned reputation there on many fronts; as a P.G. teacher; a research guide; a public speaker, as an administrator and teacher in the Pre-examination Training Centre, an official
in charge of many All India Historical Conferences held there, and above all the architect and organizer of the P.G. History faculty there and so forth. While there he wrote many important books like a Tamil enlarged version of *Historigraphy* (*Varalāru Varaiyival*) in which he introduced hundreds of Tamil technical terms which he had invented, a Tamil translation of the *Śaṅgam Polity* (*Śaṅgakālvālyiyal*), the first vol. of the 3 vol. *History of South India*, as well as the II Vol. of his *History of Tamilnad*. He introduced in Shillong the praiseworthy academic tradition of professorial inaugural addresses. His address to the North East Indian chapter of the Engineers' Guild when the Meghalaya Minister for Education presided was most noteworthy not only because a historian was addressing with such stunning effect scientists and technologists but also because of the immense popularity the lecture gained. He was frequently requisitioned to address the Aurobindo Patha Mandir meetings. On one occasion when the Mothers' Day also was celebrated, Mr. N. K. Rustomjee, Meghalaya Government Chief Secretary, presided. He remarked that during the past twenty years he had not heard such a lecture in English delivered by an Indian.

N.S. became a member of the ICHR when Mr. Morarji Desai formed the Government of India and he was a member for two terms (six years) from 1979 representing Tamilnad, though serving in Shillong. In June 1979 he left Shillong after a final retirement from public academic life and returned to Madurai to spend the rest of his temporal life dedicating all his time to reading and writing. He stayed in Madurai from 1979 to 1983 June when he repaired to Udumalpet. He knows the freedom, which retirement from public service provides but the restless soul will know no real rest.

68. Dr. P. N. Chopra and Dr. T. K. Ravindran were the authors of the II and III vols. respectively.

69. He had written a famous book entitled the *Enchanted Frontier*.
In Madurai where he stayed for four years after his retirement from Shillong, most people expected him to lead a life of leisure and pious religious meditation. But he was not made that way. Though he shared with Charles Lamb the idea about retirement so well expressed in Lamb's charming way, N.S. however, chooses to invent work when none existed. Nothing could keep him away from his desk and chair, pen and paper, manuscripts and printers. He now found more time to write whatever he wished to, and as much of it as he could. He started writing short stories, poems, critical essays etc. apart from the textbooks for the P.G. students in English and in Tamil. All his books mentioned in appendix A which have not been mentioned so far were written after 1979. He began with the Tamil version of the History of Tamilnad (Tamijaha Varalaru I) and followed it up with Historical Research methodology. His textbooks too were standard, original works and they were unlike the bazaar notes, which are popular with the less studious teachers and students. He sets no limits to his thoughts, which he puts on paper for publication. Controversy, difference of opinion etc. did not worry him; for he wrote because of an irresistible urge to write.

He started an International Institute of Tamil Historical Studies (INITHS) and a number of his friends and students joined it and periodical seminars were held under its auspices. He edited a journal called Tamil Studies, a quarterly which immediately became popular with and was welcomed by such learned men like N.S.Ramaswami, N.Murugesa Mudalian and Singaravelu of KualaLampur. 13 issues of the journal appeared. But after he left for Udumalpet the Institute was closed and the publication of the journal was stopped. He wanted to rid himself of as much superfluous work as he could; and he did so. He stopped writing reviews to journals; discouraged

70. Charles Lamb: Vide his essay 'The Superannuated man'.
universities from appointing him as examiner of scripts. And public speeches also he tried to reduce to the unavoidable minimum level.

In Madurai he started a publishing firm-Ennes Publications, of which his last son became the proprietor and who published most of N.S.' works thereafter. Old age has had its irresistible toll on his health. Whenever the inclination to write arises, as it will, in such persons, he does not even mind his health but sits down to work. The author of this thesis however was given full access to all his works including the unpublished ones; as she has had with him so far his unexpressed thoughts in the course of intensive interviews.

N.S. was 80 years old in 1995 and that year saw the publication and presentation to him of a festschrift called Professor N.Subramanian: The man and his work; in which a detailed account of the man and his world of thought and expression is given in extenso.

N.S. the author of 110 works in Tamil and in English, for the young and the old, for the pupil and the preceptor and the scholar as well as the general reader is to-day the senior most historian in Tamilnad not only in virtue of his written work and the spoken word but because of the total personality of the scholar extraordinary that he is.

This thesis is entitled 'Professor N.Subrahmaian, the Historian' essentially because he is mainly and professionally a historian and only besides that he is a man of letters too. The purpose of this thesis is to give a biographical sketch of the professor and mention and critically estimate his work not only historical, but also literary. That an extraordinary scholar, teacher, speaker and writer of his stature needs to be assessed and introduced to the scholarly public is the justification for this thesis.