I

n July 1999, I wrote an article criticising the qualitative methods used by the Centre for Social Studies (CSS) to evaluate the conditions of the Sardar Sarovar Project (SSP) resettlees in Gujarat. I argued that the methods they employed, which were obtained by averaging survey results from 120 different sites, failed to pick up the severity and extent of casual wage labour in sites that were more badly endowed than average. I also compared their conclusions with my fieldwork findings in several resettlement sites and a submerging village [Whitehead 1999].

By documenting household/farm input and output for the monsoon period, my study revealed the severity of the problems of economic maintenance which all households in some resettlement sites experienced from one harvest season to the next. This was supplemented by focus group questions and participant observation, which showed that for the summer of 1997, all households I visited had experienced a severe shortfall of output over input. To supplement this shortfall, all had to have one or more members working as casual wage labour in sites that were more badly endowed than average. I also compared their conclusions with my fieldwork findings in several resettlement sites and a submerging village [Whitehead 1999].

A detailed analysis of the information derived from the monitoring and evaluation reports of resettled oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project reiterates the fact that the condition of the new settlements has not been accurately portrayed. A refutation of the charges of selectivity and bias of the author’s earlier critique of these reports.

JUDITH WHITEHEAD

A Further Critique

A detailed analysis of the information derived from the monitoring and evaluation reports of resettled oustees of the Sardar Sarovar Project reiterates the fact that the condition of the new settlements has not been accurately portrayed. A refutation of the charges of selectivity and bias of the author’s earlier critique of these reports.

Judith Whitehead perhaps wants the reader to believe that her own research findings are not based on the discourse in (the) M and E reports”. Thus in addition to selectivity and bias, Sah accuses me of plagiarism.

But as if that were not enough, having noted that I begin my paper by referring to an article in The Indian Express which reported that the 1996-97 CSS findings had seemingly showed that life was generally much improved for the resettlees, he turns the knife in the wound by saying “she relies on newspaper reporting and headlines to criticise the Centre for Social Studies”. Since that paragraph was used as an eye-catching introduction alone, this is a cheap and desperate shot and one which is completely at odds with the calumny that I misinterpreted the CSS reports.

This emotive attack, which questions both my honesty and academic integrity, cannot of course remain unanswered. I shall therefore in this paper justify the statements I made, and show, where selectivity and bias are concerned, that they rest more with CSS reports than with my own work.

Sah begins the second paragraph of his paper in the following way:

At the outset let me mention five points: one, the CSS has been studying the ‘oustees’ of 19 villages of Gujarat since 1981. All our 24 M and E reports are interlinked. We have stayed in the villages without interpreter (sic), not for flying visit (sic) of a week or two but for months together. We have been presenting our understandings (sic) in these reports. Information presented in one report need not be repeated in every other. Therefore, if one is honest and desires to have a realistic grasp of issues and analyses, one ought to read the reports together [Sah 1999:1].

If we ignore the snide remark about ‘flying visit(s)’, the perceptive reader will note that Sah effectively rubbishes the CSS reports himself by stating that “information presented in one report need not be repeated in every other”. This is a most curious statement to make about survey work which purports to evaluate the economic conditions of resettlees each year. For how can any judgment be made about how conditions in the resettlement sites are affecting their inhabitants if only certain aspects are examined in one year and others in the next? Furthermore, the claim that the CSS workers spend (or have spent) months on end at the resettlement sites is hogwash. Most of the CSS work is done by research assistants making their own flying visits to the resettlement sites, where they hand out questionnaires to largely non-literate inhabitants, wave goodbye and then return two weeks later to collect whichever ones have been filled out. At some sites, I was told, they even fail to turn up at all. Such is the method of CSS survey work among the Gujarat resettlees.

Moreover, “reading the reports together” is easier said than done. None is readily available either through universities or bookstores. After printing, the reports are sent to the CSS (a private institute), which forwards several copies to the government and then secretes the remainder in its own library. Anyone wanting to visit the library must first obtain permission to do so. No reports are sent to the resettlees, and to my knowledge, no Bhil resettlees has ever been invited to their library. Thus does the CSS jealously guard its own. However, it is rumoured that contraband copies are available on the black market. While I have no direct knowledge of this, two photocopied reports were slid under my door one night by an unknown well-wisher.

But if gaining access to the reports is difficult, the style in which they are written places an added burden on the reader. The writer’s inadequate grasp of the English language not only makes them impenetrable
in places, but often downright nonsensical. The singular, for example, is often mistakenly used for the plural, and vice versa, punctuation is often misplaced, the meanings of words are misunderstood, and seemingly contradictory statements sometimes follow each other. More seriously, gobbledygook is often substituted for clear, reasoned argument.

A few examples taken from Chapter 3 of Report 23 and Chapter 6 of Report 22 will suffice to demonstrate the incomprehensibility of some of the language.

(a) Since deciphering all these from pre-post comparison since is difficult, findings of this chapter should be interpreted with caution (CSS M and E Reports 22:97).
(b) What is worth noting is that the market has not discriminating against them... (M and E Report 23:19).
(c) This will also help in reducing the risk of water logging so very potential with surface irrigation schemes (ibid:18).
(d) PAPS from over 77 per cent of locations have reported that they had allocated a non-traditional crop fodder on their farms (ibid:16).
(e) Market purchased inputs like chemical fertilisers and plant protection chemicals have gained noticeable presence compared to what the situation was in the submerging villages (ibid:16).
(f) It is worth noting that despite low farm income amongst the households experiencing total failure of a crop (Table 3.4), the low yield has not adversely affected food consumption and hence caloric intake of the affected PAPS (ibid:18).
(g) It is likely that households who have faced total crop failure on more than one crop may be adversely affected in terms of access to food and nutrition. This also reveals the capability of agriculture even in dry zones to sustain marginal fluctuation without adversely affecting consumption (ibid:18).
(h) SSPA reports that all the villages where perceptions regarding drinking water is negative are having drinking water facilities by hand pump or well or tube-well with pipe line except Jetpur, and Kukarda where oustees are residing at their agricultural plots on their own wish (CSS M and E 22:101).
(i) It is worth to mention here that it is not that SSPA is not sensitive to problems relating unproductive land (ibid:102).

Any high school student could do better. Yet for sheer unreadability, the first paragraph of Chapter 7 from the 1995-96 report entitled ‘Changing Health Perceptions and Practices’ is hard to beat:

All societies face organio-human imbalances in the form of illness. Although, for their survival known societies have created systems to cope with disease (Costigioni: 1947), the notion of health and illness vary depending upon and influenced by their social and cultural milieu. Therefore, the perceptions and practices relating to ill-health, health care, and causes of disease present a mosaic. In India, like any other country, social science has helped the society use the concepts and knowledge in order to clarify and analyse medical and socio-psychological problems and behaviour relating to health and illness (ibid 22:110).

Discourse Analysis

In order to counteract Sah’s claim that I have misinterpreted the reports by saying they “painted a rosy picture of rehabilitation” among the resettlees, I decided to put the two reports, one covering the period 1995-96 and the other 1996-97, to computerised discourse tests. In fact, his accusation of my misinterpretation is the only charge which seems worthy of a sustained reply.

Computerised discourse programmes enjoy a growing popularity among social scientists, who are increasingly required to treat written archives as ethnographic data, especially those who study institutional contexts [Buchignani nd]. My analysis uses Folio Views 4.0, a programme which identifies all words in an archive, arranges them in their order of relevance, and retrieves them in the context of the sentence and paragraph in which they occur. In fact, Folio Views 4.0, unlike other computer discourse programmes such as Ethnograph and Nud*ist, can display all these features of an archive or infobase simultaneously.

The text that is tested here consists of two infobases: all chapters of the CSS Monitoring and Evaluation Reports for 1995-96 and 1996-97 that deal with economic issues. They were entered into my computer using an IBM scanner and OCR technology. I entered the entire reports in this archive, except the tables. Typographic errors in the entered reports were corrected by comparing them to the photocopies of the originals. In other words, the written portions of the reports were reproduced verbatim in my computer. Because of the accusation of my biased and selective reading, I did not include computer notes which I had taken from other reports while staying at CSS, Surat. These notes included summaries of the major findings from the 1992-93, 1993-94 and 1994-95 reports. For the fieldwork I carried out in 1997 and 1998, the recent reports were of greatest relevance, as they referred to the climatic and economic variations which then affected the resettlement sites. These reports also contained some comparisons with previous years.

The major finding of this discourse analysis is that the conclusions I reached from my original understanding of the reports were ones which any informed reader could reasonably be expected to draw. This is particularly true for the phenomenon of proletarianisation, an important finding from my own data. It is clear from a computer-generated discourse analysis of these reports that I should not have expected to find the situation of crop failure and proletarianisation I encountered in the Dabhoi ‘tuluka’, Vadodara district resettlement sites during the summer of 1997.

I examined the reports using Folio Views 4.1 from several angles. The first examination was a quantitative method, which identified the frequency of 30 keywords that are commonly used in the economic study of agriculture in India. In addition, the semantic equivalents of these initial terms were also perused. I also added words which seemed specifically relevant to the reports from my several readings of them. These keywords were derived from the following categories: first that of productive inputs, like land, labour, and technology; second that of markets; third that of consumption; and finally a miscellaneous category.


For markets, I included words relating to both production and consumption. For production goods I chose the following words: ‘credit’, ‘loans’, ‘seed(s)’, ‘debt/ indebted’, ‘moneylender’, ‘interlinked market(s)’, ‘bonded labour’, ‘surplus’, and ‘distress’. For consumption goods, I selected the following terms: ‘consumption/ consumer/consumed’, ‘calorie(s)’, and ‘poverty’.

Finally, I also included a number of words which related to climatic variations, such as ‘abnormal monsoon’ and ‘water logging’, since these appear quite often in these two reports. In the miscellaneous category, I also included terms associated with the economic and social transformation accompanying movement from the hill villages to the resettlement sites, such
as ‘change’, ‘increase’, ‘decrease’, ‘improve/improvement’, ‘decline’, ‘modern’, and ‘traditional’. The quantitative results of this particular search yielded the results shown in the Table.

A cursory glance at the frequency of ‘hits’ suggests that certain categories of agrarian relations and agrarian production appear much more often than others in the reports. As expected we find that the terms ‘land’, ‘own land’, and ‘landownership’ register a large number of hits. Similarly, ‘irrigation’ is frequently mentioned. However, given that both reports followed ‘abnormal’ monsoons in which yields were lower than ‘normal’, the absence of any or many hits around the cluster ‘debt/indebted’, ‘loans’, ‘distress sales’, ‘interlinked markets’, ‘harvest failure’, ‘poverty’, and ‘bonded labour’ is quite striking. Equally striking is the absence or relative absence of hits for ‘landless’, ‘barren’ or ‘infertile land’, ‘decrease or decline’, or even ‘water logging’. Another visible feature of these hits is the frequency with which markets and consumption are mentioned. In the category of markets, there is a relative frequency of ‘feel good’ terms, like ‘credit’ instead of ‘loans’ or ‘debt’, ‘consumption’ over ‘poverty’, ‘improvement’ over ‘decline’, and ‘sale of surplus’ over ‘distress sale’. This lends some, albeit superficial, support to my contention that the majority of statements in the reports present a quite optimistic portrait of market behaviour and consumption in the resettlement sites. Further support comes from the prevalence of ‘cheerful’ over ‘critical’ terms in other categories: ‘increase’ and ‘improvement’ are mentioned much more frequently than ‘decrease’ or ‘decline’; ‘yield’ is sometimes used when referring to ‘crop failure’, and ‘employment’ sometimes refers to ‘casual labour’.

Perhaps the optimistic words Sah uses are derived from categories relating to a neoclassical Chayanovian peasant universe: there appear to be individual landowners who produce crops and consume inputs regularly through increased integration into perfectly competitive markets. And their yields appear to improve over time through the application of modern technology and future irrigation from the SSPA canals. There is scant mention of ‘landlessness’ or ‘infertile land’, ‘moneylenders’ or ‘capital’, and certainly none of ‘caste’, ‘class’, ‘interlinked markets’, ‘indebtedness’, ‘proletarianisation’, or ‘bonded labour’. The only negativity emerges from the glitches caused by ‘irrigation problems’ and ‘abnormal monsoons’. But there are no ‘harvest failures’, not much ‘casual labour’, and even very little mention of ‘water logging’. Nothing, in other words, that cannot be corrected by normal weather and a little tinkering by the SSPA.

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Obviously, it would be biased to caricature the underlying theory of two reports of 120 and 47 pages respectively from a superficial counting of hits. This was not the only test I applied to them. I also placed the most frequently used terms in their contexts. Discursively speaking, this means linking each term to others, since signifiers obviously change their meaning in relation to others. To count as a meaningful statement, I included other words in sentences, and the sentences both before and after the one in which these keywords occur. However, I am unable to enlarge this context to Sah’s injunction and include the entire series of reports from 1981 as a relevant context for a keyword in 1996 and 1997. As mentioned, other reports are not easily available either to me or to the general public.

Secondly, enough information should exist in each and every report to provide readers with an adequate view of contemporary conditions of resettlement for a particular year. Logically speaking, the reader should not have to read a report from, say 1985, to find out about general economic conditions in 1997 or 1998.

**Land**

The general topic that emerged from my fieldwork was that since 5 acres of fertile land was both the maximum land award of the NWDT in 1978 and the minimum amount which various land reform commissions in India believed to be sufficient to feed an average family, any problems with the land would force some into wage labour for a portion of any year, even during ‘normal’ weather. In addition, the resettlees might also have taken loans in cash and even to eventual loss of landholdings.

To re-examine what the reports said on this topic, I contextualised the key terms that related to major factors of production: land, credit and labour. These key terms were placed in their sentence/paragraph context and evaluated as either favourable, unfavourable or neutral. This judgment related to how the conditions of resettlement were being described, especially in comparison to submerging villages. This is because the underlying goal of resettlement is that the new economic conditions should be equal to or better than those found in submerging villages. My hypothesis is that if the majority of hits are favourable for the resettlement sites, we can conclude that the general gist of the reports supports a positive evaluation of the process of resettlement. Hence, I am right in my reading of the reports and my perception of the reports is one that most educated readers would arrive at. If not, then Sah is right when he states that CSS reports predated my findings relating to landlessness, wage labour and impoverishment, and that I was selective and biased in my reading of his reports.

To start with, what is the context in which ‘landless’ and ‘landlessness’ is mentioned? As the Table shows, it was a most infrequently mentioned word on the list, despite the fact that a number of resettlees have complained that many – how many, we do not know from the reports – of major sons had not received any land by 1997-98. It appears only twice in Report 22 and twice in Report 23. Here is the main example from Report 22:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Number of Hits 1995-96</th>
<th>Number of Hits 1996-97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land/landownership</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infertile</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barren</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landless</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigation</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yield</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest failure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullock(s)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal husbandry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tractors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market(s)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan(s)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seed(s)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surplus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt/indebted</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moneylender</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlinked markets</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distress sales</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption/consuming</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal monsoon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water logging</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease/decline</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
landless (Table 4.5). Bulk of these households are PAPs in search of agricultural land. SSPA reports that by September 1996, about 96 per cent of total 4,557 PAPs have been allotted agricultural land. Only 4 per cent of total relocated PAPs are landless (SSPA reply op cit). Contrast, owned land was relatively scarce in submerging villages. As high as 32 per cent of households did not legally owned land in submerging villages (CSS M and E Reports 22:67).

In the 1996-97 report, we find the following example:

Landless households are less than 4 per cent in the new sites, and even these are identified as PAPs and are in process of acquiring land (CSS M and E Reports 23:16).

Yet in the resettlement site I stayed in, 12 individuals identified as major sons reported that as of August 1997, they had not received any land. All were working as agricultural labourers, despite the fact that two possessed high school graduation certificates. Again, there is an apparent disjunction between the lived experience of fieldwork, admittedly limited and short, and the kind of information that the statistical averages of the reports suggest.

When ‘land’ was examined in the 1996-97 report, there were a total of 42 hits registered for ‘land’, ‘own land’, and ‘own cultivation’. I included the latter phrase as it is often used when issues such as availability, productivity, fertility of land are being discussed. Under this heading, there are 26 hits which register a definite favourable comparison between land in the resettlement sites and land in submerging villages, six which are neutral, and 10 which can be interpreted as unfavourable. Yet even under the unfavourable heading, I was generous to Sah: I also included some statements that seem ambiguously unfavourable, because they are related to oustees’ perceptions, which are often discounted as unreliable. The following example is, I think, fairly typical:

It is not strange to identify sites like Ambavadi, Vadaj 2 and Chandanagar to have some dissatisfaction, for either the farm production was low there (like Chandanagar and Ambavadi), or the land has been received by PAPs by the time this survey was conducted and thus, the relocated PAPs have to face hardship of low wages because opportunity of farm employment is low round the new sites (as the case was in Vadaj-2). Both these situations result in forming negative perceptions. The finding relating to perceptions should be interpreted with caution. For, as had been mentioned in earlier M and E Reports, these findings do not always reflect the comparison of economic conditions in new sites with that of the submerging villages. Moreover, over the years PAPs exposure to various groups may also have heightened their expectations from the R and R. It is also likely that some PAPs may be using the survey results as a platform to pressure the policy makers to relocate them owing to different reasons than their dissatisfaction relating to economic well-being in their new sites (M and E Report, 23:9).

Two more examples of an ambiguous statement which I classed as unfavourable, is the following:

There are new sites like Malu, Ambavadi Piparvati, Chikda-1 and 2, and Dabhavan where some PAP’s perceive that their land lacks in quality (M and E Report 22). Although all these PAPs have themselves selected their relocation sites, they now perceive that those PAPs who had waited and are relocated in Dabhoi area are relatively better off (ibid:43).

Again, this statement about reported problems with land fertility is placed in the chapter on ‘Oustee’s Perceptions’, which have to be treated ‘with caution’, except, it seems, where perceptions are favourable, such as when 90 per cent of PAPs are stated to find general conditions better in the resettlement sites. In total, these ambiguously unfavourable statements relating to land, which are largely explanatory to tables recording oustees’ perceptions, amount to four hits in total. Indeed, when the hits are grouped in the 27 sentence clusters in which they occur, then the statements become overwhelmingly favourable, with 15 out of 27 being favourable, seven being neutral and only five being unfavourable. In addition, the majority of unambiguously unfavourable statements about land in the 1996-97 report relate only to the lack of irrigation in some resettlement sites in Dediapada taluka. According to the reports, this lack can be remedied through improved credit services for private irrigation, e.g., tube wells. Below is an example of a statement I classed as unfavourable relating to unirrigated land:

Although there is a marked improvement in crop yields in comparison to yields of the submerging villages by two times, the yield in the reference year are lower than either best of the yields (attained in 1993-94) or the district average. This is indicative of the nature of vulnerability of dry land agriculture to face where low yields could set in with marginal weather changes (CSS M and E Reports 23:38).

Yet in comparison with submerging villages, even this statement cannot be considered strictly unfavourable, since all the submerging villages, we are told, lacked irrigation. Hence the ratio of favourable and neutral statements to total approaches 26:27, with just one being strictly and unambiguously unfavourable. It occurs in the very last recommendation of the report:

SSPA to expedite identification and treatment, including relocation in the genuine cases, of unproductive land (ibid:47).

By now, it is clear that I am relatively generous to Sah in my evaluation of statements regarding land. Given the ways in which complaints about unproductive land have been dealt with in the chapter on ‘Oustee’ Perceptions’, I, as a reader, am led to conclude that “genuine cases of unproductive land”, as the report terms them, must be extremely few.

In Report 22, ‘land’, ‘own land’, and ‘landholding(s)’ register many more hits, 98 to be exact. Here potential and/or perceived problems with land are discussed at greater length. Discounting headings, I counted 52 favourable statements regarding land and landholding, 25 neutral statements and 20 unfavourable statements. In this report also, the unfavourable statements tend to be followed by positive qualifying statements, which minimise any overall perception of serious problems. At times, these favourable qualifying statements appear to be Sardar Sarovar Punavarsav Agency (SSPA) replies to the findings, but not always. They never consist of replies of the oustees to either the findings or any of the SSPA replies. The following is, I think, a fairly typical example of how unfavourable findings are dealt with in relation to comparisons with submerging villages:

Variations in operated land (Table 4.6) show that about 72 per cent of operated holding in new sites are small, about 17 per cent medium and 6 per cent of operated holdings are large. In contrast to this, about two-thirds of operated holdings in submerging villages were medium (5 to 10 acres). This finding of relatively small holdings in the new sites should be interpreted with caution because of the following reasons: first, the operated agricultural holding to the submerging villages were supporting a larger number of family members compared to the family members in the new sites (Table 2.1). Second, if converted to per PAP, the size of operated holding before relocation may be comparable to the size of operated holding in new...
site. Third, about half of the operated area was encroached forest land which may not be under submergence. Lastly, the productivity of land is significantly higher in the new sites compared to submerging villages. On an average, the agricultural productivity per unit of area in new site is about one and a half to two times more than productivity of submerging villages (21st M and E Report).

Despite a relatively larger operational holding in submerging villages, the oustees had to substantiate their income by a number of activities including migration for labouring, gathering of minor forest based produce. As against this, land alone is able to provide sustenance in the new sites where agriculture has become the main economic activity (CSS M and E Reports, 22:71).

Surely, if 5 acres of land is the NWDT award, and is a basic middle farm size, there should be no households with small farms in the resettlement sites. The 6 per cent with large holdings also seems strange, especially when compared with the report’s finding that only 3 per cent of holdings are jointly owned. Yet this apparently damaging finding of small holdings is then neutralised by a number of qualifying statements. This leads readers to conclude that so many mitigating factors exist before and after resettlement that the actual decrease in landholding cannot be considered a real loss. I would like to add that the term ‘encroached land’ is itself a historical construction dating to colonial forest laws and land settlements. Due to the historical specificities of ‘jumbh’ cultivation, land in many submerging villages was considered both owned and operated, including that lying fallow for 10 to 20 years. I suspect that the total area considered both owned and operated in indigenous categories may be much higher than that reported in CSS reports or elsewhere.

In general, the statements regarding land, including its availability, size, fertility and productivity, represent an overwhelmingly favourable vote for the process of resettlement in report 22 also. The favourable ‘hits’ state that the new lands are more productive, they generate higher yields of cash, as compared with subsistence crops, cases of major sons are being dealt with efficiently. In particular, complaints are viewed as more psychological than real, relating mainly to oustees’ raised expectations after experiences in the resettlement sites. The following is an example of what I classed as a favourable hit:

By September 1996, PAPs in Gujarat have been allotted 15,114 hectare of agricultural land. About 82 per cent of this land is having irrigation facilities or come (sic) under the command area (CSS M and E Reports 22:77).

With 77 favourable or neutral statements about landholding and only 20 unfavourable statements, I can hardly be accused of bias if I say that the overriding impression of most readers is that the reports portray satisfactory to excellent land settlement. Any minor problems are temporary and are dealt with quickly by SSPA. Indeed, 19 of the 20 unfavourable statements regarding land in Report 22 are contained in Chapter 6 on oustees’ perceptions, which we are often told, must be treated with ‘caution’.

Another category that seems strikingly different in the reports as compared with my fieldwork experience is found in the category of animals owned, which is usually discussed in the reports in relation to animal husbandry. Despite my finding that almost all households had lost substantial numbers, if not all their livestock due to lack of grazing land, disease, debt and lack of fodder, the reports state that:

Nevertheless, increasing importance of animal husbandry is also responsible for diverting labour from own cultivation to this allied activity (CSS M and E Reports 23:6).

In new sites cattle rearing and grazing had accounted for only 3 per cent of employment during early years of relocation. This was owing to unfamiliarity to cattle rearing on farm, away from forest and lack of understanding relating to stall feeding the milch animal. Of late, this activity has slowly regained its lost importance. From about 33 to 39 per cent of working population engaged in animal husbandry in submerging villages for about 80 days per year, animal husbandry in the reference year employs about 56 per cent of the population for about 57 days per year (ibid:7).

Two other processes are worth to note: first, due to improved extension support relating to stall feeding of milch animal and judicious relocation of land for food and fodder, animal husbandry has regained its lost importance (CSS M and E Reports 22:7).

In all the seven hits relating to animals and animal husbandry, it is reported that this activity is regaining or has regained the importance it had in the submerging villages. Since Tadvi and Vasawa Bhils in Gujarart forest villages often have large herds of cattle, bullocks and goats, this finding came as a real surprise to me.

Credit

Finally, I would like to examine a series of signifiers clustered around the credit market, e.g. credit, loans, debt/indebted, and poverty. As shown in the Table, ‘moneylender’, ‘interlinked markets’ and ‘bonded’ were not mentioned at all, ‘loan(s)’ three times in Report 22 and twice in 1996-97, ‘poverty’ was not mentioned in Report 22, but twice in Report 23, ‘debt’ was discussed three times in Report 22 and not at all in Report 23. However, the more optimistic term ‘credit’ is mentioned twice in Report 22 and six times in Report 23. Since adverse conditions could compel individuals into the labour market or indebtedness, one might expect that the CSS reports would monitor the potential or actual debt situation of resettlees quite closely.

The 1995-96 report mentions ‘loan’ three times. This is not in the context of ‘moneylending’, which does not appear to exist in the reports, but either in terms of a government loan scheme or personal loans. The following are examples, the first of which I classed as positive and the second as neutral:

(1) It should, however, be noted that all these new sites have come into existence recently and PAPs in these locations are in the process of acquiring these assets through Jeevandhgra loan or as a grant from SSPA under the R and R package (CSS M and E Reports 22:79).

(2) About 8 per cent of households were Indebted during the reference period (Table 6.4). A debt of Rs 5,053 per borrower is relatively large sum. Only 13 per cent of household who had borrowed did so for productive purpose, cultivation. About 6 per cent households were indebted owing to consumption loan. About 4 per cent households were indebted owing to marriage, death in the family. As high as 76 per cent household did not wish to report reasons for their indebtedness. We believe, a large part of this unreported cases could be conspicuous consumption forced on them due to consumerism and mimicking the life style of host villagers (CSS M and E Reports 22:106).

In the 1996-97 report, loans are mentioned twice: either in a neutral way in the first example or in a favourable way in the second example.

(1) It would also be worth understanding the farmers’ marketing behaviour in the year succeeding a not so good agricultural year. For, it is expected that the savings may have been depleted and repayment of
consumption loans may force the PAPs to market more of their produce at the cost of current consumption (CSS M and E Reports 23:9).

(2) Although only 4 per cent of PAPs have taken cooperative loan (Rs 3,711 per borrower), and 6 per cent of PAPs have acquired commercial loan (4,270 Rs per borrower), this is an early indication that stigma (M and E Reports 16 and 20) attached with credit market is slowly breaking (CSS M and E Reports:19).

In all other hits, borrowing money is mentioned in very favourable terms, with credit being the most frequent term used in relation to the practice of borrowing. Despite the fact that the 1996-97 report followed two abnormal monsoons and harvests, all six hits were either favourable or neutral for the term credit. The following are, I believe, representative examples of first a neutral and then a favourable statement.

(1) The need, thus, is to strengthen the water use in the area by developing credit schemes for group financing for groundwater exploitation (CSS M and E Reports 23:18).

(2) An intriguing feature of input links is slowly increasing integration of PAPs with credit market. In order to intensify this process, the SSPA has to bring more medium and long-term productive credit especially for groundwater exploitation. This in its turn will result in increasing demand for short-term production credit as well (CSS M and E Report 23:19).

In the 1995-96 report, the word credit appears twice in one paragraph, and both times in a completely neutral context:

Villages in Zone I were relatively developed among the three zones. Farmers in these villages had access to institutions like agricultural credit cooperatives and services like schools, transportation, and primary health services were either available in the villages or within a reach of 5 km. Farmers were also familiar with land, labour, credit, input and output markets (CSS M and E Report 22:110).

In case of the word ‘poverty’, it is not mentioned in Report 22, except in a bibliographic reference in the seventh chapter which consists of a medical case study. In Report 23, one hit was unfavourable and one was neutral. The following are the ‘hits’ registered by Folio Views:

(1) This negative relationship between growth of agricultural production and poverty is not confined to good or bad agricultural years; even during normal years between 1988-89 and 1994-95 about 20 per cent of PAPs have low yields, and consequently relatively low calorie intake (CSS M and E Reports 23:41).

(2) The negative relationship between agricultural growth and rural poverty has been well shown by the findings of our study (ibid:43).

Labour

In relation to information regarding the question of proletarianisation, the category of labour and employment is very important. Yet Sah and I view it in very different terms. In the 1995-96 report, we find that ‘labour’ occurs 20 times, and 19 times in the 1996-97 report. In the 1995-96 report, labour often clusters in a statement which might contain, say five hits. If the number of times labour was mentioned in a paragraph which concluded with a discussion of improving conditions for resettlees over the submerging villages, I counted these hits as favourable. If not, then they were either counted as neutral or unfavourable. In this regard, 14 of the 20 hits were clustered in favourable sentences and paragraphs. A good example of a favourable hit is the following:

Over the years, as well as in comparison of submerging villages, the proportion of population engaged as labour has reduced; casual labour and agricultural labour was providing employment to about 11 to 17 per cent and 4 per cent of the working population respectively in submerging villages, the employment rate has now fallen to 1 to 2 per cent of the working population in the new sites. The reduced importance to labouring activities is not because of lack of opportunities but because own agriculture is able to provide for family needs adequately (CSS M and E Reports, 22:11).

An example of a neutral hit for the word labour is the following sentence – neutral since it merely states a methodological goal:

It is hypothesised that PAPs who have low yield, low irrigation, high dependence of market for food consumption, and higher dependence of non-farm labour may be dissatisfied with their economic condition (ibid:10).

Finally an example of a unfavourable hit, in which the conditions of labour in the resettlement site were acknowledged as difficult or worse than those in the submerging villages, is the following:

Although, income and consumption have not deteriorated despite the fact the household dependence on animal husbandry has reduced, households ability to cope with natural disasters like drought and crop failure have weakened (20th M and E Report).

Higher agricultural productivity though gives cushion during these disasters... Increased wage labour and sales of assets are mishap mitigating devices. Nonetheless, over a period of time the oustee households in new sites are learning to judiciously allocate their agricultural land between food and fodder (M and E Report 22:80).

This apparently unfavourable hit has been included because it illustrates the difficulties in characterising statements solely as favourable or unfavourable. When in doubt, I generously judged the statements as unfavourable. This difficulty arises from the fact that positive statements often follow negative ones, e.g., “Higher agricultural productivity, though, gives cushion during these disasters” or “over a period of time oustee households are learning to judiciously allocate their land between food and fodder”. Another example of these ‘upbeat’ statements following a report of unfavourable findings relates to the conclusion that PAPs with low yields and higher dependence of non-farm labour are more dissatisfied with their economic condition. This is immediately followed by the statement that “90 per cent of PAPs feel their economic conditions are better than or equal to that experienced in the submerging villages”. Even so, 17 of 20 hits register either a favourable or neutral result for ‘labour’ and only three of register unfavourable hits. Hence, I think the most accurate understanding any reader could draw from the 1995-96 report is that, overall, the proletarianisation of PAPs due to infertile or rocky land, lack of land, harvest failure, or water-logging is just not happening in any significant way. In other words, the general gist of the reports is the exact opposite of the theme of my 1999 essay.

Although the 1996-97 report followed another ‘abnormal’ monsoon, it is nearly as favourable as Report 23 about the ability of the land settlement to absorb all the labour requirements of PAP households. There were 19 hits for the term labour, although the term is used in this report not just for wage work, but also for work on one’s own farm. With both contexts included, 9 of 19 hits were favourable, another 9 were relatively neutral, and only one appeared unfavourable. In this report, one finds the relatively surprising statistic that only 1 per cent of the oustee population had to resort to casual agricultural work, despite the fact that the previous two monsoons had led to decreased yields. It is worth quoting at some length:

Over the years as well as in comparison...
of submerging villages, the proportion of population engaged as agricultural labour in new sites has reduced. From about 4 per cent of working population in submerging villages, the proportion of population engaged as agricultural labour at new sites has reduced to 1 per cent in the reference year (Table 2.2). On an average agricultural labour provided about 33 days of employment to the population engaged in the activity. Households located in about 45 per cent of new sites did not prefer to sending their members for agricultural labour work. Whereas, in another 30 per cent of new sites some family member have opted for agricultural labour work, though it was only for one round (Appendix 2.10). It is only in the case of households located in Vadaj-2 agricultural labour work was significantly large (M and E Reports 23:8).

This was quite hard to square with my experience during the monsoon of 1997, in which all households reported having at least one adult member, male or female, working as an agricultural labourer for the entire monsoon season, due to waterlogged land. Although this site was listed in the tables as one of the 120 surveyed, it was not mentioned either in the discussion above or in any of the report’s commentary as a resettlement site which possessed a higher than average percentage of people working as agricultural labourers. If that resettlement site was considered average, one wonders how difficult the situation might have been in Vadaj-2. As I mentioned in my earlier essay, the 1 per cent global figure can only be squared with the prevalence of proletarianisation in a number of sites, because it appears that rather high percentages in some sites seem to have been multiplied with much lower percentages. Percentages multiplied often lead to a lower decimal. Hence the number of such sites with high percentages of proletarianisation remains, to date, any-one’s guess and is surely masked by the global figures of 2 per cent for 1995-96 and 1 per cent for 1996-97.

The other curious aspect of the way that labour is discussed in these reports is the prevalence of words implying ‘free choice’ to describe people taking agricultural labouring jobs or migrating out of the resettlement sites, say to Bharuch or Surat, for construction work. There is a prevalence of words such as options, opting for, or taking the opportunity ‘of’ wage work. This occurs in nine cases in which wage work is described in Report 22 and 11 times in Report 23. In these instances, resettlees seem to exercise free choice in a perfectly equilibrated job, land and credit market. They hence seem to be ‘pulled’ from their homes for construction work or the migratory agricultural labour force because, in comparison to farming, they are offered such wonderful opportunities. Yet to hear people in the resettlement sites I stayed in speak almost uniformly about being pushed into sporadic day labour because their resettlement land is so waterlogged that there has been complete harvest failure, surely puts a different spin on the tale of ‘labour opportunities’ than that offered in CSS reports. In addition, the words ‘labour’ and ‘employment’ are often interchanged, so that working on one’s own land becomes labour input in the 1995-96 report, while a few discussions of migrating for construction work speak of it as an employment opportunity. These relatively upbeat words heighten the impression that the position of PAPs in relation to the labour market is advantageous as compared with the submerging villages, where they were ‘required to supplement their meagre subsistence holdings with gathering of minor forest produce and wage work’.

I think I have shown that my comprehension of the 1995-96 and 1996-97 CSS reports with respect to the category of ‘labour’ is basically accurate. By this I mean that any informed reader would have drawn a similar conclusion, no matter what Sah says he meant in these reports. I also hope I have demonstrated that in regard to land, labour and credit, three of the most important factors of agricultural production, my interpretation of the reports was not biased or selective, as Sah asserts. In fact, I have deliberately placed ambiguously neutral to unfavourable statements in the unfavourable category, hence interpreting these results in a conservative manner. I have read the reports of 1995-96 and 1996-97 both qualitatively and quantitatively, from front to back and back to front. From any angle, they produce the same favourable impression of the resettlement process in comparison to the submerging village. Potentially serious problems with the resettlement policies can be read into the reports only by lifting a few statements or paragraphs from their contexts, since negative findings are followed by numerous qualifying statements. This does not allow the reader to draw any but satisfactory to excellent impression of resettlement implementation. Above all, any potentially serious economic problems are discussed as due to an abnormal monsoon or lack of irrigation, the latter of which will end once the dam has been completed.

**Motivation**

Since the question of interpretation of the reports has been addressed, I would like to discuss the question of my motivation, also an issue for Sah. He asserts that due to my ‘flying visit’, I could not have found anything original and I must have acquired my information from the discourse in the reports themselves. On one point alone, I agree with Sah. Due to my limited time for fieldwork, I doubt there is little that is theoretically original in my findings. Yet the data certainly was, and it was information which had previously never made it into the reports at all. Due to my employment at a teaching-intensive university, I have only been able to conduct fieldwork during the monsoon periods of 1997-99. These methodological limitations, unlike Sah’s, were honestly spelled out in my original paper.

Perhaps further explanation is required by Sah concerning the charge of plagiarism. After consulting the reports in 1997, I visited seven resettlement sites in Dabhoi taluka, before deciding on one cluster for fieldwork that summer. In the interim, I constructed a household budget questionnaire, finding that I had to brush off the dust from a decade-old training in development anthropology to find categories that related to what I initially saw. Except as counter-examples, not once did the reports come to mind.

Not only would I not plagiarise findings from the reports, I could not have. As far as I was concerned, there was nothing in them of any use. The severity of conditions was far greater than I had been led to believe. Instead, literature which provided appropriate concepts to understand impoverishment and proletarianisation included Utsa Patnaik’s (1990) detailed contributions to the mode of production debate, Lenin’s *Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1957), Krishna Bharadwaj’s (1974) discussion of interlinked markets, Sundaraya’s detailed analysis of class relations in Indian agriculture, debates over the minimal size of operational holdings that emerged from land reform debates, and Bremen’s (1974, 1985) work on segmented labour markets in southern Gujarat [see also, for example, Bhaduri 1983; Byres 1983; Joshi 1975]. All of them discussed different aspects of proletarianisation in ways that are hardly present in the reports.
and all were used by me to construct house-
hold budgets, not only for this study, but also for one carried out ten years’ previously.

The fact that these household budgets were finished quickly is not, as Sah charges, 
caused by my penchant for plagiarism. It was due to the clarity of concepts in the 
above literature and my heightened effi-
ciency from having studied this issue 
elsewhere before. In addition, complete 
crop failure in 1997 monsoon on Dabhoi 
resettlement land shortened the work 
because I didn’t have to enter anything in 
the ‘output’ side. In fact, after the first two 
households, my questions about this were 
often met with an exasperated reply: “But, 
sister, can’t you see, there is nothing in the 
fields”. This was followed by my lengthy 
(and increasingly nonsensical) replies as 
to why written words, and especially, 
numbers, are so necessary for ‘netas’.

We now come to a more reasonable 
explanation for my writing the article to 
which Sah objects so strongly. Criticising 
the internationally-registered Centre for 
Social Studies on the basis of six weeks’ 
fieldwork was not something I considered either pleasurable or career-enhancing. 
However, my motivation was so clearly 
stated in my earlier essay, I cannot under-
stand why anyone would miss it. It was 
pure shock at the difference between the 
impression I received from reading the 
reports and what I personally witnessed 
from visiting resettlement sites in suppos-
edly one of the most favourably irrigated 
and best situated resettlement regions. 
Complete crop failure due to waterlog-
ging, death and/or distress sales of live-
stock, sale of women’s silver, distress sales 
of teak and ‘kheir’ house posts and fur-
niture, one or several members of every 
household going to the roadway to search 
for daily agricultural work from 
neighbouring farmers, young adult sons 
without land or employment and drinking 
heavily, tin shacks leaking water badly, 
households forgoing a midday meal to 
decrease their consumption costs, perma-
nent migration to Bharuch of some for 
construction work, people trying, but being 
stopped, from returning to submerging 
villages, and even two resettlement sites 
that were nearly deserted. The reports that 
I previously read at the Centre hardly 
prepared me for these conditions.

Because of my limited time, I interpreted 
my results in the most conservative man-
er and did not discuss those observations 
requiring more extensive documentation. 
These would include possible relationships 
between resettlement, unemployment, loss 
of livestock and alcoholism; and the con-
nnections between gender, problems with 
host villagers, and increasing seclusion of 
Bhil women. I only focused on the material 
for which I had irrefutable data, while 
recognising the need for further study of 
the winter crop season.

I would still argue, however, that there 
is nothing like water seeping into your 
sleeping quarters to remind you of the 
daily constraints that one’s ‘subjects’ of 
research have to live with. In the absence 
of Bhils being able to represent themselves 
in this debate, participant/observation can 
provide a more accurate explanation of 
reasons for their observed economic ‘choices’ and ‘options’ than masses of statistically generated data, although the 
former is much more lengthy for a large 
number of sites. From the embodied ex-
perience of living there, one comes to 
know pretty quickly whether individuals 
can or cannot economically maintain and 
reproduce their households with completely 
waterlogged land, high rates of indebted-
ness, rocky or infertile land, high costs for 
productive inputs, lack of subsistence food 
from either field or forest, lack of good job 
opportunities, sales of silver and death of 
livestock. Those are things one saw every 
day in fieldwork, and formed the structure 
of major constraints and limited opportu-
nities through which people lived out their 

In retrospect, it seems logical that the 
NWDT land settlement would necessarily 
result in significant proletarianisation, since 
five acres of land per householdholder (invari-
ably male) is the bare minimum required 
for middle peasant or middle farm status. 
Any crisis of household/farm economic 
maintenance, such as bad monsoon, portion 
of land being infertile or rocky, lack of 
institutional support for market inputs, or 
even long-term illness could drive house-
hold members into the labour market or 
into serious indebtedness. What is really 
surprising is that 15 years after the settle-
ment process began, the total numbers of 
the new agrarian proletariat from the re-
settlement sites are still unknown, but are 
surely greater than 1 or 2 per cent reported 
by the 1995-96 and 1996-97 CSS reports.

Notes
[I would like to thank Rodney Davies for his 
suggestions for improving this rebuttal and also 
the SSRC for providing funding for these studies. 
I would also like to thank Rasik Bhai Tadvi for 
his help in the fieldwork I carried out last summer.]

References
London.

Bharadwaj, Krishna (1974): Production Con-
ditions in Indian Agriculture: A Study Based 
on ‘Oustee’s Perceptions’, which are then treated 
indebtedness, is, however, placed in Chapter 6 
on ‘Oustee’sPerceptions’, which are then treated 
as unreliable.

Possibly the most boring academic task I’ve 
done since finishing the bibliography for my PhD thesis.