SUBALTERN RESISTANCE IN CIRO ALEGRÍA'S *EL MUNDO ES ANCHO Y AJENO* AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S *CHOTTI MUNDA AND HIS ARROW*: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores subaltern resistance in two novels—Ciro Alegría's *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (1941) and Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* (1980)—within a comparative framework. The subaltern groups under consideration are the Andean indigenous (in Peru), and the tribal, or *adivasi,* communities (in India). I examine the extent of these novels' empowering representations of these groups, both of which are politically, economically, socially and culturally marginalised in their respective countries. To what extent do these texts challenge mainstream narratives of victimization, without ignoring the key issues that contribute to subaltern oppression?

Using textual analysis and borrowing from ideas generated in the field of subaltern studies from Indian-origin intellectuals such as Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as well as from Peruvian thinkers like José Carlos Mariátegui and Antonio Cornejo Polar, the study identifies and examines some broad thematic and formal points of contact between the two novels: land, nature, memory, writing and orality, education, and solidarity. My conclusions are varied, and attentive to the fact that these are communities in flux, as citizens impacted by and negotiating with modernity. I take care to avoid easy binaries. The texts I am discussing recuperate these communities as historical actors with agency with respect to the past, present and the future, in a postcolonial context. We find that these groups, to a greater or lesser degree in the two texts, adapt their way through change, showing that they are peoples with their own (continuing) history, and are able visionaries of their own futures. Finally, I also note that these texts remain relevant today, and my larger purpose is to imagine fresh possibilities for a south-south dialogue between Latin America and South Asia in the literary field.

Lay Summary

This thesis was born from identifying similarities in mainstream depictions of indigenous communities in Latin America, and tribal groups in India, many of whose concerns overlap. Often, these communities are either invisible, or appear only as victims of oppression. This study aims to contest this silencing and stereotyping by creating a dialogue via literature that gives centrestage to these groups. It compares a classic work from Peru to a novel by one of India's foremost authors, examining both the themes and the formal options that their authors have chosen. The thesis examines the extent to which the two books offer empowering representations of these peoples, not limited to violent resistance. The term "subaltern" has been employed to refer to such groups' subordinate status in their respective countries. The overarching purpose of this thesis is to use the critical analysis of literary works to contribute to greater south-south interactions (Latin America and South Asia) about and from subaltern populations. The thesis is most accessible to those who read both English and Spanish.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Charu Mittal.

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Introduction

The present study aims to explore, within a comparative framework, the theme of subaltern resistance in the (Latin American) Andean indigenous and the tribal/*adivasi* subject in India, as seen in the work of two well-known authors from these regions: Peruvian novelist Ciro Alegría and Indian writer Mahasweta Devi, respectively. The novels under consideration are Alegría's *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (hereafter, simply *El mundo*), published in 1941, and Devi's *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* (*Chotti Munda*), published in 1980. Devi's novel is originally in Bengali, a prominent regional language of India. I am using an English translation by well-known literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

The theme of subaltern resistance drew my attention on reading a 2010 article by Indian writer-activist Arundhati Roy. Here, she describes the time she spent in the company of, and interacting with, India's "dreaded" Maoist insurgents,[1] dubbed the country's "gravest internal security threat" by the then Prime Minister:

> It's easier on the liberal conscience to believe that the war in the forests is a war between the Government of India and the Maoists, who call elections a sham, Parliament a pigsty and have openly declared their intention to overthrow the Indian State. It's convenient to forget that tribal people in Central India have a history of resistance that predates Mao by

[1] Maoist armed left-wing radicals have been active against the Indian state for over fifty years, currently with "a significant presence in ten of India's twenty-nine states" (Scanlon 335). The term "Maoist" (influenced by Mao's ideology) is used interchangeably with "Naxalite," which derives from the name of the village of Naxalbari (in the state of West Bengal) where landless tribal peasants rose in revolt in 1967. "Organized by Bengal's communist cadres into a ragged resistance, the farmers attacked and killed landlords and policemen, redistributed hoarded grain, ransacked homesteads, and set up people's courts to mete out the rough justice of revenge. They called for the overthrow of the Indian state and aspired to build a society in the mold of China... [driven by] the notion that the revolution should, if necessary, kill its way to utopia. Hundreds of students in India's largest cities—Calcutta, Delhi, Bombay—dropped out of college to fight for and with the peasants. [...] The Maoists presently operate out of the dense forests of central India [...] The overthrow of the Indian state is still their stated goal. Their root grievance—gross economic injustice—is the same as that of the original Naxalites, but now they are also fighting more direct threats: mining companies eager to extract the billions of dollars' worth of minerals in the forests where millions of *adivasis* subsist without basic services" (Martyris 39-40).

> centuries. [...] The Ho, the Oraon, the Kols, the Santhals, the Mundas and the Gonds[2] have all rebelled several times, against the British, against [landowners] and moneylenders. The rebellions were cruelly crushed, many thousands killed, but the people were never conquered. (“Walking with the Comrades”)

Although focused on the Maoist movement, her article highlights that *adivasi* agency has existed (and continues to do so) with or without the presence of external stimuli or support. The idea of “remaining unconquered” despite failed rebellions indicates covert realms of resistance. On the other hand, narratives about ethnic communities—whether indigenous or tribal groups—that make visible only their victimization and not their stories (and strategies) of resistance, give the impression of their being passive recipients of oppression. In an address to the Latin American Communist Conference in Buenos Aires, pioneering Peruvian Marxist thinker of the early decades of the twentieth century, José Carlos Mariátegui, had also dismissed the view of degraded and oppressed Indians as “incapable of any form of struggle or resistance: “The long history of Indigenous insurrections and mutinies, and the resulting massacres and repression, is sufficient in itself to dispel this impression” (qtd. in Webber 591). A reading of Alegría’s and Devi’s novels will help us locate (and reveal) strategies of resistance that underline these communities’ agency, and convey hope of a different future. To what extent does the idea of subaltern resistance—violent or otherwise—appear in the two texts I have chosen? What is the nature, and extent of success, of the resistances they depict?

1.Indigeneity and Other Terms

An explanation of the terms “indigenous” and “tribal”/“*adivasi*,” which indicate subalternity in the two novels, is in order. I will briefly discuss the definitions I have subscribed to in the usage

[2] Names of different *adivasi* groups inhabiting the region.

of these terms, and clarify some of the problematics involved. Stephen Corry cites the International Labour Organization Convention 169's definition of indigenous peoples: "Peoples in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present State boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions" (19). Here, Corry also notes that the ILO has added self-identification as indigenous as a fundamental criterion in order to be considered indigenous. Alegría's novel, the story of Rumi, an Andean[3] indigenous community (or *ayllu)* of northern Peru, leaves little doubt about the indigeneity of its inhabitants in this sense. The book makes references to Rumi's existence since the pre-colonial period, its difference from the whites and (later) mestizos and their systems, as well as its sustained sense of distinctive identity.

Corry also provides a definition of the term "tribal peoples": "those which have followed ways of life for many generations that are largely self-sufficient, and are clearly different from the mainstream and dominant society" (22). I have used the terms "tribal" and "*adivasi"* interchangeably with reference to such communities in India. The word "a*divasi*" could be translated as "ancient inhabitants," and the term is commonly used in (at least) India's northern half to refer to the country's tribal peoples. However, in the Indian context, the term "tribe," and even *adivasi,* are not without their problems, both for the negative connotations they sometimes carry, as well as for creating an illusion of uniformity with respect to what were, and are, highly heterogenous groups. Indra Munshi explains that the term 'tribe' was used by the colonial government in India "to categorise a large number of groups who did not fit the categories of

[3] The book also has a chapter focusing on the indigenous groups of the Amazon, with incidents from their history and folklore. These groups are no less indigenous than the Andeans, and are likely to be "tribal" in ways that Rumi is not.

‘caste’ or ‘Hindu’... [it] subsumed communities very different from one another in terms of demographic size, linguistic and cultural traits, ecological conditions, material conditions of living, but essentially ‘primitive,’ ‘backward’ and ‘uncivilised’ in character” (1).[4] Such primitivizing strains have not been absent from the discourse of post-independence Indian governments either. Elen Turner (citing Skaria) points out, “since at least the 1960s, the emphasis has been on assimilating *adivasis* so that they become ‘developed’, as their ‘wildness’ ‘epitomized Indian backwardness”. She further notes how much of the large body of literature on tribals available in the country “fails to treat adivasis as modern subjects who live in a country impacted by globalisation, development and their attendant processes. Much of this [...] is anthropological, and though useful [...] has a tendency to treat them as a timeless people” (330).[5] Indeed, the term *adivasi* itself, meaning “ancient dwellers,” can (and often does) cage the peoples it refers to into a period far back in the past, neither modern nor contemporary.

While India has one of the biggest concentrations of tribal peoples, Corry notes, “no one knows to what degree they are ‘more’ indigenous than others” (95-96). This brings us to the

[4] Biswamoy Pati also underlines the heterogenous composition of groups classified under this general term: “The terms ‘tribal’ as well as ‘adivasi’ (ancient people) need to be substantially clarified to situate large sections of people like the Nagas, Chakmas, Bhils, Dangs, Koyas, Todas, Paniyas, Kondareddis, Mundas, Kandhas or Santals. The term ‘adivasi’ or ‘tribal’ used in this book is used to describe people who have distinct identities in terms of language, cultural bonds and religion, including a certain commonness in terms of their economic life, which represents a significant degree of marginalisation” (8).

[5] A scene in Colombian director Ciro Guerra’s 2015 film, *El abrazo de la serpiente*, dramatises the impulse towards maintaining indigenous/tribal peoples in such “timelessness.” Karamakate, a member of an indigenous Amazonian tribe and Theo, a German ethnographer, are taking leave of a friendly tribe that had sheltered them overnight. Theo refuses to leave his compass with the tribe—whose members are smitten with the device—saying it could negatively impact their traditional knowledge of using the stars as guide. But Karamakate rebukes him: “El conocimiento pertenece a todos.”

Aboriginal artists face something similar. Saulteaux artist and curator Robert Houle, in writing of Aboriginal artists, says: “Somehow we are not allowed to come into the 20th century. We are not allowed to interpret our own reality; the way our communities respond to everyday life. We are regarded as living museum pieces. This is perpetuated by even the most lavish, most knowledgeable, professional representations of our cultural heritage” (qtd. in Beard and Hopkins 19).

Modernity aside, cases of indigenous peoples being relegated to non-existence in the present are not uncommon. One counter narrative is found in Tony Castanha’s book *The Myth of Indigenous Caribbean Extinction: Continuity and Reclamation in Borikén* (2010), “which challenges the myth that ‘the indigenous inhabitants of mainly the northern Antilles were extinguished by the Spaniards around the mid-sixteenth century’” (Hartley 186).

problem of calling India's tribal groups the country's "indigenous" people. Following independence, the term "Scheduled Tribe" came to denote tribes which were scheduled as such under the Constitution of India, "distinguished from other communities by relative isolation, cultural distinctiveness and low level of production and subsistence, not necessarily original inhabitants" (Munshi 1). Pati notes that in the South Asian context, the 'indigenous' argument is difficult to sustain as "interactions between the tribal/non-tribal people have a serious past" (2-3). At the moment of the colonial encounter, India was home to a diversity of groups besides those that came to be labelled "tribals." In other words, tribal groups were not the only peoples living in the region when European contact began. Yet, *adivasi* groups did exist as distinct from the dominant sections of society in the region: in language, economic practices and ways of life, religion, belief systems, etc. Thus, not everything that came to be associated with the category of tribals was a colonial creation. Citing Bara, Munshi notes how "the negative traits associated with the term 'tribe' had precolonial origins; the colonial state merely transformed the prejudices already contained in [Hindu] Brahminical texts from the region" (1). This adds another layer of complexity to the history of the Indian subcontinent, where European colonial views of *adivasi* groups were heavily influenced by existing perspectives in the region. People from the plains (in India) had a long-running pre-colonial history of envisioning the *adivasis* as beasts, depicting them as animal-like creatures with long teeth, horns and tails in scriptures, insulting them as demons and monsters (Gupta 44).

Corry also points out that "for the most part, the term 'indigenous peoples' is used today to describe groups which have had ultimate control of their lands taken by later arrivals: they are subject to the domination of others. Used in this sense, descent is less important than political perception" (18). This is important to keep in mind for the overlap between the Peruvian

indigenous in *El mundo* and the Indian *adivasi* community in *Chotti Munda.* It is one of the principal grounds on which our comparison becomes feasible: control of their ancestral lands, just as in the case of Rumi, has been wrested from the Munda *adivasis* by outsiders, a process that predates but was greatly accelerated by the establishment of colonial rule in India. In *El mundo*, the focus is on the continued ease of land alienation through instruments such as the law. The question of land and forest rights has formed the core of their grievances over the last two centuries, if not more.[6]

2. Subalternity and Markers of Subaltern Difference

It is important to clarify the meaning of the term "subaltern," since it is at the heart of my comparative analysis of the two novels. Beginning in the early 1980s, the idea of the "subaltern," taken from the *Prison Notebooks* of Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, was employed by the Subaltern Studies Collective, a group of South Asian historians who "sought to recover the histories of insurgency and resistance in South Asia from the perspective of subordinate social classes" (Morton 162-163). While Gramsci had used "subaltern" as a substitute for "proletariat" while in prison in the 1930s, to avoid government censorship, the collective was not interested in simply applying Gramsci's own definition of the term or his interpretations of subaltern history. Instead, they aimed to "construct a critical theory of subalternity that was initially inspired by Gramscian Marxism and then reconfigured to interpret and analyze South Asian history and

[6]Land gets emphasis in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a legally non-binding but nonetheless landmark formal international recognition of their rights, adopted in 2007: "International law recognises what special rapporteur Daes has defined as indigenous permanent sovereignty over their lands and natural resources, and rights that are entrenched in the UNDRIP at articles 25 and 26. Importantly, indigenous peoples' rights to land and resources, are described as 'permanent sovereignty' and as a set of inherent and inalienable collective rights arising from indigenous polities themselves irrespective of colonial and contemporary state processes. They are wide ranging and include, among others, the right to own and to control their lands, the right to not be forcibly dis-placed from their lands, to oversee development and/or conservation processes, to maintain traditional ecological knowledge and practices, and to be consulted in projects affectingtheir territories according to the principle of free, prior and informed consent" (Bellier and Préaud 480-81).

society beyond the parameters which could have been anticipated by Gramsci himself" (Chaturvedi 9-10). Ranajit Guha, editor of the Subaltern Studies series, defined the term "subaltern" as "a general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way" (Preface 35). While it originated from the South Asian experience (but with terminology of Italian origin), the Subaltern Studies project found resonance across the postcolonial world. A Latin American Subaltern Studies Group[7] (hereafter, LASSG) came about in 1992, brought together, according to Ileana Rodríguez, by "a shared intuition that the project launched by the South Asian Subaltern Studies Collective in the 1980s was somehow relevant to our work as Latin Americanists" ("Reading Subalterns" 1). According to her, this trans-regional exchange had to battle accusations of "disregarding the specificities of Latin America itself" too, for incorporating the idea of subaltern studies into the Latin American field. Considering the region's long tradition of borrowing from European and U.S. theory, Marxism, etc., she finds such rejection on the basis of borrowing from South Asian subalternists "strange, to say the least." However, she adds, these criticisms and debates strengthened the push for a South-South dialogue in place of the long-standing North-South one (7).

I subscribe to Guha's definition of the term. In this thesis, the subaltern condition is primarily used with reference to members of the two groups at the centre of each novel: the Andean indigenous group that inhabits Rumi in *El mundo,* and the Munda tribal group in *Chotti Munda.*[8] The common ground of subalternity for these groups is the inferior status accorded to them in their respective nation-states, economically, politically, socially and culturally. What also binds them is a postcolonial condition that is marked by a remarkable continuity with

[7] The group was dissolved in the year 2000.

[8] This is not to discount the presence of other subaltern groups within these texts, who may fall outside these specific communities (such as the Amazonian indigenous tribes in the former, or the Hindu outcastes in the latter).

colonial time, in terms of core issues and conditions (dispossession, oppression, etc.) that make such marginalisation possible. Both novels draw attention to these groups' subalternity in their nations' historical discourse as well: by highlighting certain "other," often forgotten, historical events, they fight what Guha terms in the context of Indian nationalism, the "spurious and un-historical monism" ("Projects for Our Time" 43) of elite historiography. In this way, they help imagine them as historical actors with agency for purposeful action, where previously none was thought possible, or attended to.

Spivak's position, as both the translator of Devi's text and a member of the Subaltern Studies Group (she joined in 1996), should also be borne in mind. In her essay "Deconstructing Historiography," she underlines not just what for her are the laudatory aspects of the project but also some of her criticisms of the group's work. She points out, "I am progressively inclined, then, to read the retrieval of subaltern consciousness as the charting of what in post-structuralist language would be called the subaltern subject-effect" (12). This is a key point: the subalterns in these novels are not "real," and thus they do not correspond to any real agency. Our exercise of examining subaltern resistance in these texts, therefore, is limited to reading empowering *representations* of the subaltern and not to confuse this as corresponding to subaltern agency in the real world. As Rosalind C. Morris notes, "subalternity is not that which could, if given a ventriloquist, speak the truth of its oppression or disclose the plenitude of its being. The hundreds of shelves of well-intentioned books claiming to speak for or give voice to the subaltern cannot ultimately escape the problem of translation in its fullsense" (8).

Translation is inherently part of the present study, not least because it makes two different works speak to (and through) each other. Yet, the intention is not to try to translate what cannot be translated, viz. the voice of the subaltern themselves, by forgetting that these are

imaginations of the what and how of their self-articulation. Simultaneously, we should remember the real purpose of the exercise: to find ways of listening better to subaltern voices (and silences) in the real world.

Language and literacy, both within and beyond these novels, function as important markers of subaltern difference, although to varying degrees and effects. The Rumi community in *El mundo* speaks Spanish; what marks their speech as different from others is their use of certain Quechua words ("*taita*," for instance, meaning "father") and the transcription of their direct speech as it might *sound*, rather than with standard Spanish spelling, thus emphasizing their distinctiveness. For instance, this is Rosendo speaking: "Ya había *escuchao* esas murmuraciones y es triste [...]. Si el Abdón se compró escopeta, *jue* su gusto, lo *mesmo* que si cualquiera va al pueblo [...] Es verdad que mata los *venaos*, pero los *venaos* no son de nadie" (344; ch. I).[9] Here, the text puts "eschuchao" for the standard Spanish "escuchado"; "jue" for "fue"; and so on. The story is told by an omniscient narrator, whose style is not that of the indigenous people of Rumi. There is a contrast between the indigenous subaltern speech and the narration in the third person in that the latter is in "standard" Spanish. However, as the reading progresses, one could become too accustomed to this style, and the difference withdraw into the background, especially since quantitatively, dialogue here occupies a secondary place compared to reported speech. Besides, most of the dialogue belongs either to the *comuneros* or the like, with the *gamonal*, and others of his kind (such as representatives of the legal world) appearing and speaking only sporadically in the narrative. Therefore, after a point, how the indigenous

[9]I have provided chapter numbers while quoting from *El mundo* so that readers may locate them easily in standalone copies of the novel. Since I have used a copy of Alegría's *Novelas Completas*, page numbers alone would not have helped. For *Chotti Munda*, I have followed the same practice to maintain homogeneity rather than out of need.

speak in Alegría's novel becomes naturalized and progressively loses its force as a marker of difference. That is, it does not remain as sharp or constant a reminder of their specificity.

Rumi's illiteracy is made clear from the beginning; it is a recurring theme in the novel and dramatized in the plot as the *comunidad* tries in vain to navigate its way through the maze of intimidating and mystifying legal vocabulary, and the written word. Several levels of exclusion operate within the same language, acting as gatekeepers to control admission. Our affective ties to Rumi are contrasted with our position as readers who understand that which is inaccessible to the community. It is tough to overlook the irony that it is through *reading*—the very means of his oppression—that we are aware of Rosendo's utter exhaustion and sense of inadequacy faced with the written word;[10] we have to confront the fact that we ourselves belong to the world that he is fighting. Thus, language and literacy do not just mark the boundaries between the subaltern Rumi from the dominant Amenábar et al., but also make clear the distance between Rumi and us, as well as Rumi and the writer Alegría.

In *Chotti Munda*, Devi achieves, according to Spivak, "the sustained aura of subaltern speech, without the loss of dignity of the speakers. It is as if normativity has been withdrawn from the speech of the rural gentry" (Foreword vii). Indeed, this is marked in the contrast between the (exploitative) moneylender's speech, which, while closer to a more "correct" language, does not convey the good sense and depth in Chotti's more "broken" language. The question of language (for us) is made more complex by the fact of reading it in English translation, which Spivak clearly admits is not meant for "the Indian reader who doesn't read any

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[10] The complex tension between writing and orality is also seen in Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchú's *testimonio*: "while [she] describes an attitude of cautious reserve that the *Maya* have developed about acquiring the skills of writing and reading in Spanish, her testimonial text is itself exemplary of the nuanced complexity of the dynamic between writing and orality. She depends on the written form for her account about the violence in Guatemala to be disseminated internationally, and at the same time she makes certain that the mediated written text does not subsume or appropriate the entirety of her voice" (Caso 34). However, here, non-literacy is a choice she (and often the *Maya*) make; in contrast to Rosendo's helplessness, she seems more prepared for the confrontation

Indian languages [but] for the readership in the rest of the world" (Devi, "Telling History" xvii). The levels of mediation here are multiplied: written in Bengali, the book is already at a distance from the Mundari-speaking group whose story it is. This is in contrast to Rumi, whose inhabitants have switched to Spanish for generations, as Alegría retorts against complaints of the absence of Quechua (García-Bedoya M. 30). Devi's technique, to make readers aware of these levels of mediation in her book, calls attention to itself, and repeatedly so. She inserts Munda songs into the book, always noting that since their *Mundari* language has no script, they record events in song and story. This does two things at the same time: reminds us that the language of the song we are reading is not *actually* what we are reading, and that the way we are reading it is not actually how it was (or would be) received. Thus, the boundaries between the subaltern and others are marked.

Spivak's translation adds further distance. It is fruitful to speak of Spivak's choices as a translator, especially in relation to how she renders dialogue. Before this novel, Spivak had translated shorter works by Devi, among them the story "Draupadi." Her comments in her translator's foreword there make for a telling contrast with her choices in the present novel. There, she had referred to the difficulties she faced translating Mahasweta Devi's *adivasi* Bengali into English. Even as she wanted to keep the experimental "flavour" of the original she "could not find an adequate way to present this in English without a primitivising or patronising effect." She thus "chose to use 'straight English' wherever possible as '[i]t would have been embarrassing to have used some version of the language of D.H. Lawrence's 'common people' or Faulkner's Blacks" (Spivak qtd. in Turner 335). However, in *Chotti Munda,* Spivak takes a very different approach. In the foreword, she declares that she had been long afraid of trying to translate what she calls, as mentioned above, the sustained aura of dignified subaltern speech

characteristic of Devi's prose here. She states: "straight slightly archaic prose killed the feel of the book" (vii). But the success of her endeavour is assessed differently by readers from different areas of the language spectrum. Devi's evaluation, as Spivak tells us, was fairly congratulatory: "you've shown that dialect can be dignified" (vii). On the other hand, Jon Beasley-Murray finds that Spivak "renders Munda speech in English with an odd patois that seems to be half African American, half Yorkshire [which] works in so far as it is a constant reminder of linguistic and cultural difference [...]. But much fluency is also lost, especially given how much the novel relies on dialogue. It is as though the Mundas are perpetually either slightly taciturn or strangely stuttering, even when talking among themselves." These evaluations make clear the impact of the reader's cultural background as the layers of mediation grow. In some ways, Devi may still be reading "her" own book in what is actually Spivak's translation. Beasley-Murray, more attentive to the nuances of English as a native speaker, becomes a more critical reader of the translation, even as he is distant from Devi's original. Thus, there is no wholly-privileged reader: at least one (but usually more) level(s) of translation is (are) always involved in this case.

My own position is also riddled with unexpected distances and proximity. While the cultural context of Devi's book is more easily comprehensible to me, my access to her text is necessarily mediated by Spivak's translation as I do not speak or read Bengali. In fact, Alegría's text is more "directly" available to me despite being in Spanish, which for me is a foreign language acquired relatively later in life. Thus I am in a sort of strange place: culturally closer but linguistically far from the one, linguistically closer but culturally far from the other; this is further complicated by the fact that language and culture are inextricably tied and not autonomous domains. Further complications arise when I consider that I am attempting this exercise—finding south-south links—as a student in a prestigious *North American* academic

institution, and under the supervision of faculty members at several removes from the Global South, except in their research interests. I hope these shortcomings (contradictions?) of my position will not entirely overwhelm the conversation I am trying to build between the two texts, regions, literary traditions, and peoples.

3 Justifying the Comparison

There are various parallels between the struggles of indigenous groups in Peru, and those of tribal communities in India, in both the past and the present. Both communities have occupied marginal positions—economically, socially and politically—in their respective nation-states and in the national imaginaries, before, during, and after the period of publication of these novels.[11] I analyze Mahasweta Devi's *Chotti Munda* alongside Peruvian author Ciro Alegria's *El mundo*, with the aim of highlighting not the victimization of these groups but their stories (and strategies) of resistance, whether manifest or hidden. To what extent do these works break with representations of these communities as powerless victims, especially in the context of their continuing marginalization in postcolonial times? To what extent do these novels succeed or fail in enhancing a sensation of their agency, bearing in mind the levels of mediation involved in each work? The comparative angle will help us identify other, new solidarities in today's globalized world, as we consider the similar nature of challenges faced by these vastly different and geographically-separated ethnic communities. In the context of renewed attention to literary indigenism and its proponents in the Latin American novel, Alegría deserves a fresh look. Carlos García-Bedoya M. proposes that comparative perspectives in relation to Alegría's work offer interesting possibilities: "la problemática del campesinado oprimido resulta sin duda común a los

[11] My own introduction to the situation of *adivasis* in India has been belated; contrary to what one would expect, it was exposure to questions relating to Latin American indigenous groups that led me to pay greater attention to *adivasi* issues back home.

países de lo que se dio en llamar el tercer mundo. Se abren así insospechadas posibilidades para la literatura comparada." The idea becomes even more pertinent when he (rightly) notes the relative scarcity of specialized literature on Alegría so far (29, 31). In what follows, I attempt to briefly explain the reasons I find comparative exploration worthwhile, noting similarities between the two texts and their contexts, as well as trying to address some concerns that may arise about its validity in the light of significant differences between the two.

First, how could it be productive to look at two novels, from two regions so far apart, geographically, culturally, and historically? Inscribed as my work is, within the current emergence of comparative studies on the Global South, the answer, for me, is partly suggested by Ranajit Guha's statement on how the Subaltern Studies project (born of the South Asian experience), despite the very concreteness of its regionality, could still be useful for Latin Americanists. He allows for this possibility arguing "it is not territoriality that relates our project to theirs in a bond of mutual relevance, but temporality" ("Projects for Our Time"35). Taking this further, Ileana Rodríguez, who was also a founding member of the LASSG, explains how the subaltern studies projects from both regions "were cases of criticism from the Left undertaken at different moments of our modern and postmodern histories," and that while the South Asian Collective was criticizing the postcolonial liberal state and the nationalist independence and anticolonialist movements from the Left, the LASSG was criticizing leftist states and party organizations for their liberalism. "It was the same question attacked from pre- and postrevolutionary fronts," she sums up ("Reading Subalterns" 4). But how can we justify a comparison between two novels written four decades apart? Alegría's is from 1941, and Devi's from 1980... Is it not problematic to compare them? For me, the principal ground on which these two works can be made to dialogue with each other is a postcolonial condition that shows a

continuity of oppressive conditions and structures from each one's colonial time, for a significant section of their population. The comparison is also viable if we consider how, if we look back from today, their publication dates represent an approximate mid-point in the postcolonial time of their respective nation-states: Peru's independence was proclaimed in 1821, while India won its freedom from British rule in 1947. The claims and demands of these groups in both countries, as we shall see, are increasingly visible in the present.

In terms of demographics, the indigenous population of Peru around the time when Alegría was writing, comprised more than the lion's share of the country's population. While India's *adivasi* inhabitants do not represent a comparable percentage of its total population (around eight percent), they are a substantially large number: more than 67.8 million according to the 1991 census, and the largest tribal population in any single nation-state (Chakraborty, P. 17-18).

Second, in both Peru and India, these groups have been marked by discrimination: from the mainstream *criollo/mestizo* sections of society in the former, and from the Hindus and other dominantgroups in the latter. The history as well as the present of these communities is scarred by the loss of ancestral lands and territory from the onslaught of colonial and, later, neo-imperial and corporate interests. From the widening grasp of feudal landowning systems, to the growing impact of foreign and transnational interests, the push for extractivist industry supported by governments with neoliberal agendas, indigenous and *adivasi* groups have had a lot on their plate. They are increasingly seen at the forefront of protests against large-scale power, mining, and dam projects, which threaten to further dispossess and displace large numbers of them and cause serious ecological harm. At the same time, their appeals and demands are frequently

perceived as antagonistic to "national interest," "progress" and "development" in the reigning sociopolitical climates in these countries.

Language is an important point of difference. The *adivasis* of Chotti Munda have their own language, Mundari; although the novel is unable to include the language itself, within the text it keeps reiterating that their language is Mundari, and also conveys this by marking their speech as different. However, they also closely interact with non-Mundari speaking sections—Hindus, official figures of authority, etc.—in the course of daily life, which they carry out using something like what Spivak terms an "adivasi Bengali." The indigenous of Rumi, on the other hand, have long switched to speaking Spanish, with the narrator noting how "en el norte del Perú, el quechua y los dialectos corrieron, ante el empuje del idioma de blancos y mestizos" (497; ch. V). However, despite this switch to Spanish for what were (at some point in the past) Quechua speakers, this has not changed the fact that culturally, like the Mundas, Rumi also largely operates within a well-developed system of orality, which should not be confused with mere illiteracy. The practice of Munda history through song, and Andean indigenous history through story, are indicators of this. The form of the novel, too, is alien to the cultural systems of both these communities. In the chapters that follow, I shall dwell more at length on each of these thematic similarities—land, history-telling, orality and writing, etc.—between the two books, within the overarching framework of examining their role in enhancing (or not) subaltern resistance.

4. Literature and Politics

In "Arte, Revolución y Decadencia," José Carlos Mariátegui states that he does not believe in art for art's sake: El caso es que la política [...] para mí, que la sentimos elevada a la categoría de una religión, como dice Unamuno, es la trama misma de la Historia. En las épocas clásicas, o de

plenitud de un orden, la política puede ser sólo administración y parlamento; en las épocas románticas o de crisis de un orden, la política ocupe [*sic*] el primer plano de la vida" (168). On indigenism in literature, the Peruvian thinker notes that "el indigenismo de nuestra literatura actual no está desconectado de los demás elementos nuevos de esta hora [...]. El problema indígena, tan presente en la política, la economía y la sociología no puede estar ausente de la literatura y del arte" (*Siete ensayos* 247). Similarly, a 1989 newspaper article in an Indian daily reports on an *adivasi* literary conference that raised severe criticism of the representation of *adivasis* in creative writing by reputed writers: "it was pointed out that instead of portraying the misery and struggle of Adivasis, the writers concentrated on painting the attractiveness of *adivasi* women and their alleged uninhibited sexual life" (Date, "Ire Over Portrayal").

All this underlines two things with respect to writing about indigenous/tribal peoples in literary works: that it *is* political (in terms of emphasis, and silences, for example); and that it cannot *not* be political. The uproar over representation at the conference, stems from the fact that, in practice, characters in works of literature are frequently taken to stand in, not for one, but for many. This is easily more so in the case of figures whose economic and sociocultural positions in the text reference conditions of marginality and difference from the mainstream in the real world, as in our case. Therefore, when we talk of literary works about indigenous/tribal peoples, their political implications are great. Writing about marginalized groups is bound to be politically charged, to a greater or lesser extent, whether consciously or not.

Literary writings on the *adivasis*, and those categorized as indigenous, are not only dependent on the material conditions existing in the surrounding world—as Mariátegui notes—but also in turn impact the space outside the text, as the voices at the conference show. German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt, in her essay "Culture and Politics," claims an

interdependence between culture and politics (qtd. in Canlas 448). While Arendt's work is mainly seen in terms of political theory, Simon Swift points out that she frequently takes recourse to literary examples to explain political phenomena (especially the rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century). He notes that she "thought that literature offers scope for a more attentive engagement with the problems of modern politics than political theory itself can offer" (40). He observes that, for Arendt, "Marxist vocabulary [...] was *incapable* of matching the new phenomenon of totalitarian rule with an adequate description of it" (40; emphasis mine). Considering movement to be the central political experience of totalitarianism, she felt "literature was best capable of capturing the meaning of this political experience" (40).

The imagined worlds of literature can sometimes preempt the understanding of, and find a vocabulary for, real-world phenomena that more "objective" disciplines have hitherto been unable to account for. Thus, exploring subaltern resistance in literature, especially in a comparative approach such as this, could capture new meanings and provide fresh ways of reading that may inform and enrich our political judgement as well.

One of the consequences of indigenist literary works has been the visibility it brought for these groups in the general imaginary. Images formed by stories, novels, literature, and cultural production travel fast and far. Consider only the great (international) success, and dissemination, of Alegría's novel which was published "en más de setenta ediciones en castellano y en traducciones en lenguas europeas y asiáticas" (Chang-Rodriguez 232). Ideas and images from these books have been frequently replicated/reproduced in other writing and even other media, whether this be acknowledged or not.[12] For the relative ease with which they can be passed around, and down, stories also endure longer in memory, in contrast to detailed documentation of

[12] This is not a one-way street, of course: the exchanges that occur between literature and non-literary writing (and other cultural media) can be a chicken-or-egg kind of question to resolve: it is hard to pinpoint the original influence.

revolts, for example. Evidently, there is a flip side to this: the patterns (including damaging ones) set, or endorsed, by literature have resonated for decades, in one way or another. For instance, speaking of Clorinda Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido* (1889)—a kind of forerunner to the *indigenista* novel proper—NúriaVilanova notes the strains of paternalism in this type of literature, at least until Mariátegui's interventions: "indigenism, on the one hand, recognized the mistreatment and marginality experienced by the indigenous people in their countries, but, on the other hand, it treated them as a defenseless collective that would have to be integrated into a national project ruled by the criollo—white European—mentality and culture" (366). Besides such defenselessness or lack of portrayal as active subjects, romanticisation and/or idealization is another common pattern, whether it be indigenist literature in Peru, or writing on *adivasis* in India. However, Mahasweta's writings provide a refreshing break from this mould: her "fiction and non-fiction on adivasis resists and repudiates such romanticism" (Turner 331).

The literary stories woven around these groups are also necessarily, and more prominently, intertextual, relying (often heavily) on non-literary writings (as well as oral sources). *El mundo* is an excellent example of this, influenced by Mariátegui's writings (García-Bedoya 32-33), as I shall show in chapter one. However, literary writing imaginatively mobilizes the knowledge produced or gathered elsewhere, whether history, political science, folklore, philosophy or medicine, expanding its discursive field of operation far beyond that usually available to other disciplines. Alegría's novels, for instance, "generalmente incorporan leyendas, cuentos tradicionales, y episodios de la vida real transmitidos por la tradición oral [...]. En *El mundo* el narrador se remonta al mito de los orígenes de Rumi, a historias de las tres regiones peruanas (costa, sierra y selva), al relato histórico del levantamiento de Atusparia, al mito amazónico del pájaro Ayaymama y al apólogo andino de los litigantes y el juez" (Chang-

Rodriguez 232). Something similar can be said of Devi's novel, which incorporates Munda myths of origin, historical episodes such as Birsa's uprising, and political events of the twentieth century, as well as Munda songs-as-history, and so on. One result of this interdisciplinary arc, and the novel's relative ease of access for the non-specialised reader, is that the manner of depiction of indigenous peoples contained therein tends to have a wider appeal, enjoy greater acceptance (or rejection), and a deeper influence on cultural and political perceptions.

Finally, Arundhati Roy's reply to a question she was asked following the publication of her second and much-awaited novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), is illuminating. Asked what it is that the novel form makes possible that no other form of writing does, she says that the task for the novel is to do what nothing else [non-fiction] can. She continues: "And there are things [the novel] can do [...] if you were to take out the political milestones in this book and just do nonfiction about them, they would not be what they are. Only a novel can tell you how caste, communalisation, sexism, love, music, poetry, the rise of the right all combine in a society. And the depths in which they combine. We have been trained to 'silo-ise': our brains specialise in one thing. But the radical understanding is if you can understand it all, and I think only a novel can" (Lewis). Here, Roy highlights the ability of fiction to approximate the workings of a universe, where multiple, not single, entities act together and chaotically so. The novel, which she calls "a universe, not an argument," can dramatize a multiplicity of voices and discourses simultaneously. This "noisiness" of literary art, combined with its potential to intuit before other disciplines, is a key reason to study the representation of subaltern resistance in novels.

5. Plot Summaries

El mundo es ancho y ajeno

Alegría's novel tells the story of Rumi, an indigenous *ayllu* or *comunidad*[13] in the Andes of northern Peru, set in the early part of the twentieth century. The plot follows Rumi's journey from a relatively prosperous, if precarious, independent existence, to violent destruction by the powers that be. The *comuneros* of Rumi collectively own and till their land, and equitably share the fruits of their labour. Rumi's *alcalde*, or mayor, is Rosendo Maqui, a wise old patriarch, supported by four *regidores (*councillors) in the community's governing council.

The novel's opening scene shows a snake cross Rosendo's path, as he returns to the community from collecting some herbs for his ailing wife. For Rosendo, the snake represents a bad omen; in vain, he tries to find and kill it. He then sits down to rest, contemplating the possible meanings of the bad omen: "¿Se trataba de la muerte de su mujer? ¿O de la suya? ...¿Se trataba de algún daño a la comunidad?" (341; ch. I). He is drawn into remembering the past, spanning both personal and collective memories. Musing on the communal system and values of Rumi, he recalls events that have marked him as well as his community, as well as thinking about his mentor el viejo Chauqui, his children (including adopted son Benito Castro), and even the *gamonal* Álvaro Amenábar, through whom we realise Rumi's vulnerability. Back home, Rosendo learns his wife has died. And Rumi soon finds itself the object of Amenábar's greed: in order to secure the cheap labour of its inhabitants for a mine, he plans to snatch away their independence by dispossessing them of their land. Meanwhile, the narrative also keeps track of Benito, who has been absent for several years and whose whereabouts are unknown to the community.

[13] "*Ayllu*" is an indigenous independent community.

Amenábar files a legal case claiming the community has been encroaching upon land that belongs to him. Though Rumi fights with all its might, the odds are tilted heavily against it. On losing the case, the community decides not to stay put and moves uphill to the colder climes of Lake Yanañahui. Some *comuneros* leave to seek their livelihood: five chapters are devoted to recounting their trials and tribulations in new surroundings. Rosendo is (falsely) implicated for theft, again by Amenábar, and jailed. While a young idealist lawyer provides a ray of hope to Rumi, Rosendo increasingly despairs of returning to his beloved community. One night, he is beaten to death by the guards when they suspect him of having helped another prisoner escape.

The narrative then renews its interest in Benito, paving the way for his return. Having been away for sixteen years, he has experienced oppression in many forms and places. On returning to Rumi, he speedily becomes first, councillor, then mayor, and begins to steer the community onto a path of "progress." The community briefly flourishes once more, but the happiness is short-lived. The last chapter has the *comuneros* up in arms to prevent a second forcible dispossession (they lose the appeal in the higher court) at Amenábar's behest. Their resistance proves no match for the firepower of the attacking side, and the final scene spells desolation as Benito is fatally wounded. He has only strength enough to beseech his wife and son to flee, while she implores: "¿Adónde iremos? ¿Adónde?" (943; ch. XXIV).

Chotti Munda and his Arrow

Devi's novel portrays the Munda *adivasi* community by tracing the journey of its protagonist Chotti Munda, from the early twentieth century to the late 1970s. Through him, it also shows the slow awakening of his community to a keener sense of its subordinate status, as well as an impulse toward protest and recuperation of lost pride. Born at the turn of the century, and named after the river that flows there, Chotti rises to steer his community, now languishing in misery, at

it negotiates with the challenges history throws up. Straddling the final decades of British colonial rule in India, transition to independence (in August 1947), to over three decades of the country's post-independence period, the novel raises issues of the dispossession and oppression of *adivasi* communities, land and forest rights, labour exploitation, and ecological degradation, all grimly reminiscent of today's concerns.

At the novel's outset, the young Chotti dreams of winning the archery contest at the annual fair, and is taken under his wing by Dhani Munda, an expert with the bow and arrow, who is also a veteran of past *adivasi* revolts. Dhani remembers having fought alongside legendary (historical) leader Birsa.[14] Explaining to Chotti why it was necessary to kill people from time to time, Dhani lists the reasons they had risen up in arms: "We won' eat mealie, won' obey t' terrorizin' moneylender, Diku[15], polis, will occupy arable and settled rural land, will take back t' right to t' forest"(18; ch. 2). The bond between the two outlasts Dhani's death, and Chotti earns a reputation as possessing Dhani's "spellbound" magic arrow, that never missed its target.

Winning archery competitions at one fair after another, Chotti quickly becomes a living legend. Clear-headed and wise beyond his years, "no Munda boy has behaved like him" (28; ch. 3).[16] His triumphs are celebrated in songs by his community, which also offer a sharp contrast to the miserable reality of his (and their) existence. A majority, generation after generation,

[14]"Birsa Munda (1874-1901). Legendary leader of the Munda tribals of Chhotanagpur region in Bihar, who spearheaded a revitalization and armed resistance movement of the tribals, culminating in the *Ulgulan*, or armed uprising, of 1899-1900" (Spivak, Notes 328)

[15] "Word used by the tribals of the area. Intruder. Alien. Exploiter (of the tribe), landlord, moneylender, trader, shopkeeper. In the narrow sense, 'Hindu'" (Spivak, Notes 328). Meanwhile, Biswamoy Pati has underlined the need for care while negotiating terms like '*diku*'. The emergence of affluent sections of tribals being settled through land settlements due to colonisation, as also the processes of Hinduisation (conversion to Hinduism) of tribes, "also mean the emergence of internal exploiters in the form of landlords and moneylenders from among erstwhile tribal communities [...] the insider dikus" (Pati 10).

[16] Characteristics reminiscent of Birsa Munda.

continues to give bonded labour[17] to the moneylender-cum-landowner in exchange for old debts. Colonial authorities are content with turning a blind eye as long as they can prevent “trouble” in tribal areas. However, Chotti becomes a beacon of hope: in matters big and small, the community looks to him for leadership, and to negotiate on their behalf; he also establishes an alliance with Hindus outcastes, who, like the *adivasis*, are the oppressed of the land; and he becomes teacher and guide to young Munda men, as Dhani had once been to him.

As time passes, Chotti realises more keenly how all the oppressive causes that triggered past rebellions, remain intact. The area witnesses the growing influx of outsiders and symbols of modernity (trains, mines, factories etc.), even the country’s independence. These developments change much and yet alter little in the Mundas’ material conditions; but they do provide them with some room for manoeuvre. For the post-independence era, especially the 1970s, “brings the turmoil of the outside world” into Chotti area (208; ch. 13). This is a time of the criminalization of politics, the emergence of the Naxalites, the imposition of “Emergency,”[18] and the entry of hoodlums running amok, all of which ushers in an era of fear and violence. Young Mundas take matters into their own hands, killing a couple of political ruffians. Tension ensues, and when the powers that be push them to the wall to find the killers, the novel’s final scene unfolds with Chotti, hitherto characterized by a certain pacifism, showing a defiant face in favour of his people, while the community—both the Mundas and the outcastes—put up a collaborative show

[17] “Compulsory labour which a person is forced or obliged to give free or at rates much below the market rate to a specific landowner from whom s/he may have borrowed paltry sums of money or foodgrains. The bondage may continue for generations. [...] When the traditional tribal land system was being replaced, under the British, by an alien land system, the Diku landowners, the new masters, imposed on the tribals and others the concept of forced labour. Every year, for a given number of days, a person who was cultivating certain types of land belonging to the landlord was forced to give 15-16 days free labour, or even more” (Spivak, Notes 328).

[18] A 21-month period from 1975 to 1977 during which then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency in the country citing ‘internal disturbance’. In popular parlance, this period has come to be commonly known as ‘The Emergency’. The period is considered as among the most politically tumultuous in the country when many of Gandhi’s political opponents were jailed, the press heavily censored, and fundamental freedoms of the citizens severely curbed.

of solidarity and protest. The book ends with an image rife with possibilities, of "a thousand bows upraised in space [...] a warning announced in many upraised hands" (327; ch. 17).

6. Chapter Outlines

Chapter one, "The Land, Adaptation, and Resistance," dwells on how the two subaltern groups relate to land and forest, rights over which remain a focal point of their struggle, in the colonial as well as postcolonial times of their respective nation-states. The two novels establish and explore the intimate relationship between these communities, their land, and their surroundings. This relationship is intricately bound with their identity, transcending the notions of "resource," and foregrounding the ethical component of their beliefs and value systems, in sharp contrast to the workings of feudal and modern economic systems. I also discuss these novels' use of anthropomorphism and related notions to critique modernity, something that serves to endow these groups with a new kind of protagonism. Another aspect discussed in this chapter is the dynamism of these communities. In contrast to the 'timelessness' characteristic of many writings—old and new—on indigenous and *adivasi* communities, these novels depict them as grappling with and negotiating their way through changing material conditions, which includes dispossession. I examine the extent to which these novels are successful in depicting their agency in terms of adapting to changing circumstances, as well asa subaltern consciousness in flux.

Chapter two, "Memory and Orality as Strategies of Resistance," discusses the connections between history, memory, orality, and continuity. First, I show how these novels recuperate subaltern histories which the elitism of much mainstream historiography may have hidden from view. The histories these novels emphasize are different from the dominant ones; they highlight the past(s) central to *the subaltern* groups in question. For example, in *Chotti Munda*, the "central" liberation struggle leading up to August 1947—when India becomes

independent—is sidelined, and the book emphasizes earlier, *failed adivasi* struggles of the nineteenth century. Similarly, *El mundo* does not dwell on Peru's independence from Spain.[19] More mainstream historical markers such as the War of the Pacific are noted, but overall it is the indigenous revolts of the late nineteenth century that are central, bringing attention to problems that continue to affect these communities. Secondly, their ways of recording (through memory) as well as transmitting (through speech) these histories are also in sharp contrast to official discourse. Orality functions as a significant marker of difference for the two communities in these novels, which also give space to oral forms within their texts. I show that orality is an advantageous strategy for the subaltern, and consider its role in boosting hope. I also discuss the dynamic between writing and orality in terms of differences, conflicts as well as the interdependence of these two modalities, at the level of the novels' content as well as form. Finally, the chapter looks at how this passage of oral history plays out in each novel through the central pairings of Rosendo-Benito in Alegría's novel and Dhani-Chotti in Devi's. These pairs map the negotiation between continuity and change, and its potential for empowering possibilities (or lack thereof).

The final chapter is "Directions and Possibilities for the Future." It deals with projects of hope for these subaltern groups. I discuss education and solidarities. Education in these novels spans both literacy (skills of reading and writing), as well as implying the more general sense of the awakening of a consciousness. As previously noted, these communities' oral systems and lack of literacy are a main factor differentiating them from mainstream society in their respective contexts. I look at their attitudes towards acquiring literacy, the feasibility of this project as depicted in each book, as well as its relationship with cultural resurgence and/or loss. I also

[19] Admittedly, in this case it seems logical since the novel is set nearly a century after the event. Yet, the omission is still significant considering the text does contain references to the pre-colonial Inca period, as well as colonial contact.

examine these groups' progressive awareness of their subordinate status and oppression as another form of education within the stories. I show how the element of education is significant not just in relation to the characters, but also—and more importantly—in terms of the readers. I argue that one of the main functions of these novels is their educational role for those who read them, because it leads to real-world visibility for the groups in question. Education is also closely linked to the idea of solidarity. Instances of these solidarities are both individual and collective, but they are neither equally effective nor equally desirable. I look at the kinds of solidarities these novels bring into play, the extent to which they are able to convey *and* realize them, and the dynamic between such alliances and identity. In the end, the kinds of alliances these texts point to are enduring, empowering, and meaningful.

Chapter 1: The Land, Adaptation, and Resistance

The Andean indigenous community of Rumi in *El mundo*, as well as the Munda *adivasis* in *Chotti Munda*, are primarily agricultural communities, rooted to working the land. In this chapter, I examine these subaltern groups' relationship to land and nature as depicted in these novels, and how this intimate connection provides opportunities not just for their oppression but also the impetus for resistance, sometimes in unexpected ways. I will also explore how they adapt to the changing or changed relationship to land, and in what ways this can be seen as constituting a form of resistance, ideologically or in action. In conditions where their autonomous or independent existence is either threatened or denied due to increasing land concentration in the hands of a few, we will discuss aspects such as the empowering function of their affective ties with land and Nature, and the use of proletarianization as a strategy.

In *Chotti Munda*, the moneylender-cum-landowner (Lala) appears as the main (direct) agent of exploitation, especially during the colonial period: he owns most of the land in the village. The *Mundas* who work his fields get a meagre share of the produce according to his convoluted reckoning; during drought and famine, they are forced into borrowing small amounts of money or food, which snowballs into vicious cycles of debt and bonded labour for many of them. This cycle affects them for generation after generation, binding them into providing bonded labour on Lala's land for next to nothing; so much so that this people has forgotten its customary fighter spirit and now lives "broken-backed," as a rebel character, Dhani Munda, observes to young Chotti (10; ch. 2).

Meanwhile, *El mundo* opens with a set of ominous events signaling that things in the so-far peaceable and content *comunidad* of Rumi are about to change for the worse. Here too, it is a powerful and ambitious landowner (*gamonal)* who is the main cause of direct oppression.

Indigenous labourers on his lands are little better than slaves. He is now eyeing a legal takeover of Rumi's land by accusing the community of encroachment on his own territory. What he wishes to secure through this manoeuvre is not so much the land, as the cheap labour of the *comuneros* for his mine. By getting hold of their arable land, he plans to force them into working for him.

In *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928), a study of Peru's national problems from a Marxist perspective, José Carlos Mariátegui emphasizes the importance of land for the Andean indigenous of Peru. He criticizes the failure of Republican Peru to emancipate its indigenous population, going so far as to blame it for worsening their condition (25). In his eyes, the Republic has meant the rise of a new dominant class which, he charges, has systematically appropriated indigenous lands. He adds, "en una raza de costumbre y de alma agrarias [...] este despojo ha constituido una causa de disolución material y moral. [...] el indio puede ser indiferente a todo, menos a la posesión de la tierra que sus manos y su aliento labran y fecundan religiosamente" (25). Well-known writer-activist for *adivasi* rights in India, Ramnika Gupta echoes a similar idea when she says that a tribal without land is a tribal without identity. Tribal identity, she emphasizes, is "deeply enmeshed" with the sources of their livelihood, that is, water, forest, land (46, 41). Indra Munshi also notes that while most *adivasi* groups derive their livelihood from agriculture and the forest, one of the main things differentiating them from non-tribal agricultural communities is their substantial dependence on the forests, for a variety of purposes (4).

In *Chotti Munda*, we see that forest produce in the form of animal meat, roots and tubers, flowers and leaves, wood etc. supplements the Mundas' otherwise meagre diet, income, and fuel needs. This is so especially in the earlier part of the book. Dhani Munda trains Chotti in the

jungle for a reason: “He called the jungle Our Mother [...]. Let me learn ye t’jungle.With jungle learnin’ye won’ die starvin’. What isn’t there int’ jungle?” (14; ch. 2). In his youth, besides his consistent winning streak at archery games, Chotti’s family enjoys relative nutritional abundance thanks to his frequently shooting game in the forest.

The mainly agrarian communities portrayed in these novels also represent the periphery of their respective nations’ imaginary. For instance, “the August movement[20] did not even touch the life of Chotti’s community. It was as if that was the Dikus’ struggle for liberation. Dikus never thought of the adivasis as Indian. They did not draw them into the liberation struggle. In war and Independence the life of Chotti and his cohorts remained unchanged. They stand at a distance and watch it all” (110; ch. 8). Here Devi imagines a subaltern perspective of history where the independence movement that “finally” freed India from colonial rule, is led and appropriated by certain sections of the emerging nation. The category of “Indians” has its own implicit exclusions, such as the *adivasis*. For the *adivasis* the momentous events leading up to the birth of the nation are played out at a distance.

In a similar vein, Mariátegui notes how the peasant population—in Peru, mostly indigenous—“no tenía en la revolución [de la independencia] una presencia directa, activa” and that the agenda of the revolution did not represent their demands . The failure of independence in Peru to redress the ills affecting the agrarian population, lay in its failure to uproot the *latifundio* system, according to him (*Siete ensayos* 49). By placing these margins at the centre of their stories, these novels contest such exclusion by giving protagonism to what had evidently been

[20] “Also known as the Quit India Movement of 1942. On 9 August 1942 the Congress Party and Mahatma Gandhi called the nation to participate in protests against colonial rule. The movement spread to many parts of India and thousands of people participated. It took a violent turn in many areas. Coming as it did in the middle of the Second World War, it caused considerable worry to the British Government and repressive measures were used to suppress it. Thousands of people were imprisoned and many killed” (Spivak, Notes 330).

sidestepped in grand historical narratives. This choice also puts these communities' concerns—the question of land and real agrarian reform—in the limelight.

Indeed, Ana María Peredo notes the continued resonance of Alegría's novel, when she cites regional meetings with indigenous leaders, held by the (then) Peruvian President Alan García in the 1990s: "There, [García] promised to end social injustice in the treatment of the Indigenous peoples of Peru. The young President eloquently read a few passages from the *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* by Indigenist Ciro. Indigenous leaders focused intently on every word of the young president. They were hearing the story of their everyday life" (157-158). *Chotti Munda* translator Gayatri Spivak also emphasizes the relevance and foresight exhibited in Devi's novel. Devi, in her interview with Spivak says that the tragedy of India at Independence was "not introducing thorough land reform" and allowing a basically feudal land system to stay. This system, she adds, is anti-women, anti-poor people, against toiling people. "It is the landowners who formed the ministry, and became the rulers of the country, why should they do anything else?" she points out ("Telling History" xiv). Thus, such continuity—and sometimes, the worsening—of their grievances into the present also calls attention to the inadequacy of the imagined "closures" of history from the centre.

Ramnika Gupta discusses the "double colonialism" that *adivasi* societies had to confront in pre-independence India. The introduction of the Permanent Settlement system—"the bedrock of British revenue policy"—meant that land rights in tribal areas were handed over to *zamindars* or landowners (46). This came to pass as the new system of administration did not recognize lineage/village ownership of land, due to which *adivasi* land under such arrangement was not recorded in the survey and settlement reports (Munshi 6). With this, the tribals, who were the joint masters of the whole village, would turn into, first the tenants and then landless bonded

labour for successive generations to this class of *dikus* (Gupta 46-47). In post-independence India too, the concentration of land in the hands of a few meant that colonial era power structures were never dismantled at the root. Thus, land was bound to remain the focal point of struggle.

In this chapter, first I discuss these communities' connection with land with an emphasis on their underlying beliefs and ethos. The special relationship portrayed between these communities on the one hand, and land, forest, or river on the other is depicted as being in sharp contrast to the possession and profit-centric outlook of the oppressive forces. This is often expressed in the form of affective ties to the land, which arm its inhabitants with a capacity for joy and pleasure, emotions which are not expressed in relation to the landowners, for example. This also challenges any claims to superiority of feudal as well as modern economic systems, especially in terms of their failure to arouse positive and wholesome emotions.

Then I look at these communities' links with Nature as depicted in these novels, as well as the recurring identification or overlap between Nature and the human. We will look at how these novels put anthropomorphism to use for the purposes of resistance and how they offer a critique of modernity and anthropocentrism. Finally, I examine how, despite increasingly trying conditions, the communities here exhibit a certain resilience and capacity for adapting to new circumstances. Their changing relationship to land also brings out the dynamism of subaltern consciousness.

1.1 Systems, Beliefs, and Affective Ethos

This section discusses the portrayal of the communities' existing systems in each novel, with attention to the distinctive features that set them apart from the dominant models in their respective countries. These systems may be economic (such as Rumi's communal land-sharing system of operation), political (the democratic functioning of Rumi's *consejo*, or the Mundas'

group meetings), cultural (ties to land) or ethical (resource exploitation, the significance of giving your word). These systems offer a glimpse into their underlying beliefs that, in each novel, present a sharp contrast with those of the dominant social groups. Often, this contrast is portrayed through an emphasis on the emotional links of these communities with their surroundings, and the positive affects these arouse.

We shall look at the ways in which these communities, their systems (whether living or past), and their beliefs present an ideological position—for instance, the value attached to the common good—that resists dominant modes of thinking. In this context, and building on what we discussed in the introduction to the chapter, I will highlight their relationship to land as integral to their identity, the theme of "resource curse" and how their ties to land transcend the ideas of resource and possession. We will also explore how they relate to work, such as in the case of Rumi and its emigrants. Moreover, we will see how these novels foreground the role of joy and pleasure as a less-frequently acknowledged point of contestation, taking off from María Milagros López's idea that "pleasure is one of the fundamental tools that subalterns use to contest hegemony" (Rodríguez, Acknowledgements ix). This aspect is made sharper by the identification of oppressor entities with such feelings as jealousy, possessiveness, arrogance and covetousness rather than any positive emotions. Finally, we will touch upon change, threats, and how these communities respond to them.

1.1.1Common Good, Happiness, and Land as Leveller in El mundo

In *El mundo*, Rumi is a self-sufficient *ayllu*-style community in the northern sierra of Peru, collective owner and tiller of its land, whose produce is shared among all the *comunero* families, "según sus necesidades," instead of on the basis of an abstract medium of exchange such as money (514; ch. V). Those who are unable to work due to illness or other reasons are also

provided for. Their communal life and land-sharing system form the basis of their contentment, sense of justice and belief in the natural goodness of life: “¿Sabe algo la civilización? Ella, desde luego, puede afirmar o negar la excelencia de esa vida. Los seres que se habían dado a la tarea de existir allí entendían, desde hacía siglos, que la felicidad nace de la justicia, y que la justicia nace del bien de todos. [...] Los comuneros estaban contentos de su vida” (342; ch. I). Such a sense of contentment and happiness with their way of life—revolving around the common good or *el bien común*—provides the foundation for confidence in their own values and the basis of their questioning of those of “civilization.” With the community’s intuitive *understanding* of the link between the common good, justice and happiness, so-called civilization’s claim to *knowledge* (saber) is made doubtful and its authority or ability to rule on the goodness or not of their system is also questioned. The common good becomes the source of justice, itself the fount of happiness. This contrasts with the dominant socioeconomic and juridical circumstances, where justice is strangled for individual profit, causing misery to the majority and gain to a handful.

A series of diverse incidents spread over centuries, recall how community life “toma su verdadero sentido en el trabajo de la tierra [...] el verdadero eje de su existencia” (515; ch. V). Almost an entire chapter in *El mundo*, “El maíz y el trigo,” is dedicated to relating Rumi’s crop harvesting and other tasks, and the whole community—including both men and women, the young and the old—is a participant. Work goes hand in hand with play: this is also when young lovers meet; a time for celebration, music, dancing and storytelling. There is palpable enthusiasm and harmony as music, laughter, voices and other sounds mingle “formando el himno feliz de la cosecha” (498; ch. V). Later chapters, including the one immediately following, which deals with Benito’s experiences on plantations, present a striking contrast to these upbeat scenes. There, far from a way of life, work is reduced to a means of mere survival. Not only is it

monotonous and fatigue-inducing, it has damaging consequences: discomfort and injury, snake bites, disease, indebtedness are all too common. As Benito reflects: "En Rumi los indios laboraban rápidamente, riendo, cantando y la tarea diaria era un placer. En las haciendas eran tristes y lentos y parecían hijastros de la tierra" (532; ch. VI).

Alegría's long book, ironically, also dwells a lot on silence. Silence is a constant presence in these other places of work; the labour is exhausting to the point of making speech an effort. All of Rumi's emigrants whose stories we follow—Benito, Amadeo, Augusto, or Calixto—remark on the silence of their co-workers in their new settings. "Los indios hablaban quechua, pero, en general, poco hablaban" (533; ch. VI); "casi no conversaban. Nadie conversaba. Llegaban muy cansados y se dormían" (687; ch. X). These instances present a picture questioning the value of work that produces nothing but misery and exhaustion, especially when it is so at odds with communal living in Rumi, whose inhabitants were enthusiastic about each task, from harvesting to threshing. The community ethos says that "el trabajo no debe ser para que nadie muera ni padezca sino para dar el bienestar y la alegría" (350; ch. I). The abundance of sound and cheer the Rumi emigrants have known, is met with the silence and sadness of the *peones* labouring on *haciendas*. Death is not unheard of, and suffering is an everyday event. There, storytelling is rare, and work is backbreaking and joyless.

In Rumi, the attachment to land is also a mark of distinction and elevated status for the *comuneros*. The *alcalde* and the *regidores* are noted for their special bond with the land and/or their deep knowledge of it. Rosendo's own rise within the community has much to do with demonstrating uncommonly sound judgement in matters of land and cultivation. For those aspiring to a council position in Rumi, this quality demonstrates their suitability for such responsibility. At the same time, as the harvest is in full swing, this attachment also acts as a

leveller and common link such as when the narrator notes: “Rosendo, acaso más lento que los demás, se confundía con todos y parecía no ser el alcalde, sino solamente un anciano labriego contento” (497; ch. V). Rosendo becomes just one among many in this scene of communal harmony. In this sense, the connection to land enhances individuality on the one hand, but also undercuts hierarchy and provides a somewhat equal footing for all.

However, despite the relatively idyllic continuity of Rumi—its autonomy cultivating communally-owned land based on a model dating back to Inca times—change has been coming for a long time. Surrounded by *haciendas*, its existence is precarious at best. Rosendo recalls history as passed down through generations, especially that which he knows through his own (supposed) mentor, el viejo Chauqui:

> Antes todo era comunidad. [...] Pero llegaron unos foráneos que anularon el régimen de comunidad y comenzaron a partir la tierra en pedazos y a apropiarse de esos pedazos. Los indios tenían que trabajar para los nuevos dueños. [...] les obligaban a trabajar hasta reventarlos. Los pocos indios cuya tierra no había sido arrebatada aún, acordaron continuar con su régimen de comunidad. (350; ch. I)

This “antes” is a reference to the pre-colonial Inca period, when, according to Mariátegui, the general population enjoyed material well-being, and when the collectivist model had reigned in individualism while channelling common effort to achieve social ends (*Siete ensayos* 5). Mariátegui saw the Spanish Conquest as having disrupted and destroyed this system—causing it to break and scatter into disperse *comunidades*—without substituting anything better or equally efficient in its place. It laid instead the foundation for a feudal and slave economy (6), the persistence of which, for him, was the main cause of all other ills in the country. In Alegría’s novel, Rumi has been witnessing the gradual disappearance of surrounding *ayllus*, and is wary of

neighbouring *gamonal* Álvaro Amenábar. The main plot unfolds between 1910 and 1930, a lapse of nearly a century from independence. Despite this gap, there is a continuity of colonial systems, economically, socially and politically. Andean Peru is depicted as a region where wealthy white *gamonales* such as Amenábar hold sway as a law unto themselves, and the indigenous population has an inferior status. Amenábar largely dictates the behaviour of all other entities, from the *gobernador* to the lawyers and judges.

Mariátegui points out the impotence of the written law in the face of *gamonalismo* as "el juez, el subprefecto, el comisario, el maestro, el recaudador, están enfeudados a la gran propiedad" (*Siete ensayos* 28). Where the colonial agrarian regime was responsible for replacing a great many indigenous agrarian communities with large privately-owned estates (45), the Republican period shows a continuity and consolidation of these power structures and patterns. Ricardo Silva-Santisteban points out Rumi's "características edénicas," made clear in its functioning, as well as in the fallout of the first exodus of its inhabitants, who encounter great misery once away from their natural environment (15). Rumi's existence and subsequent destruction becomes, in some ways, a re-enactment of the Spanish Conquest and its uprooting of a "socialist" model. Through this implied juxtaposition with the past, the novel infuses fresh legitimacy into the principles and demands of the indigenous communities in the Republican period, which comes to represent a repetition of that cycle of destruction and imposition catering to vested interests.

1.1.2 Land Alienation, Protectiveness, and Changefulness in Chotti Munda

The *adivasis* of *Chotti Munda* are largely farmhands—many of whom double as bonded labour during certain periods—for the moneylender-cum-landowner (*Lala*) in the village. While their current situation may be poles apart from Rumi's self-sufficiency, a vague memory of times

when things were dramatically different, persists, though in just a few members. This is the awareness of their ancient tribal land settlement pattern called *khuntkatti,* through which the Mundas had communally owned and ploughed the land, before the creation and consolidation of a system of landed aristocracy by the British led to its decline. Ramnika Gupta writes that the tribal "had *khutkatti* [*sic*] rights over forest and land; that meant they had the rights to clear the forest to prepare [a] cultivable patch of land for their own use" (47). However, besides Dhani, only two other characters in the novel —Chotti and the old priest (*pahan*)—show any awareness of the old system. In fact, the aged pahan is visibly surprised at Chotti's knowledge of this long-forgotten system.

Earlier, when Dhani had remarked to a family member that all the arable land belongs to the Mundas and the Oraons, she retorts: "That was in yer day. We've never seen landownin' Mundas and Oraons. All t'land is Diku land—Hindu land—since long ago" (13; ch. 2). This is in contrast to *El mundo* where the *ayllu* is still a living entity, even as it is dwindling due to unchecked expansion bythe big landowners. The Mundas' land may be long alienated but that has not dampened their instinctive connection with it. Here too, working the land is linked to joy. Representing communal effort and participation, it counters alienation. Chotti's and Chhagan's groups, we are told, are "ecstatic" as they begin to sow on the Lala's land: "Now the peasants and the field hands start work in the field.[...] Sowing paddy is a delightful phenomenon. [...] 'This paddy will enter the moneylender's barn'; these words escape all mental discipline and run off like naughty ragamuffins jumping into water" (117; ch. 8). In contrast to this image of poor farmhands with no legal claim to the land finding delight amid the drudgery, stands the moneylender Lala. He is overcome by jealousy when he finds Chotti's sons have managed to turn a piece of unproductive land he gave them—on the customary basis of "half harvest half

right" (140; ch. 10) into one flourishing with beautiful grain. Their labour of love only heightens his covetous instincts and he demands the land back, knowing full well he is not acting right by going back on his word.

For the Mundas, the spoken word is sacrosanct. They are not "readin'-writin' folk" (124; ch. 9). They are shown to do what they say, andsay what they do. The text contains recurring instances of employers in the Chotti village area preferring to work with the *adivasis* because they "don' know how ta cheat at work" (195; ch. 12). Once they give their word, there is no going back. Words also prove to be the trigger for Mundas' outrage at certain points in the story. Chotti's father has a heated exchange with the Lala after the latter calls him a "moneylender" owing to the family's new-found (relative) prosperity due to Chotti's success at archery. For the Mundas, far from being respectful, the term "moneylender" is synonymous with corruption and cheating. Later, Chotti is furious after the *Lala* calls the Mundas "sonsabitches," forcing him to take the word back:

> Say now if ye'll take this word back lord. I'll not go home. Me boy'll bring me bow an' arrer. From now we'll picket yer fields. Me boys are here [...] Kill t' Mundas. Then do yer stuff.
>
> There was a terrible vow in Chotti's words, unconquerable obstinacy. Tirathnath said slowly, word by staccato word, The word escaped me. I didn't want to say it. (120; ch. 8)

In the case of the land grant to Chotti, the Lala had drawn back from giving it in writing saying his word was good enough. But he goes back on hisword once he sees the land bearing good crop by the sweat of their brow. Despite this, Chotti is adamant about giving Lala a half share of the crop as agreed upon originally, even though Lala says there is no need for it: "No lord, Munda doesn' understan' yer rules. We'll give our crop" (142; ch. 10).

Meanwhile, some other Mundas cultivate small patches of land in the forest, "given us to farm cos there is no good crop." They are painfully aware that even the slightest indication of their economic betterment is perceived as a threat. When Dhani suggests the soil on their small bit of land is good enough to sow pepper instead of rice, he is reminded that the land belongs to the Hindu moneylenders: "Soon's they know pepper, they'll take away. We too know pepper grows there. Knowin' we can do nothin'"(13; ch. 2). This knowing and not being able to act upon it, or even say it, is restrictive; yet, knowing but not revealing are also conscious methods the subalterns repeatedly turn to in this book, especially in relation to "resources."

Rather than seeing it as a resource for extraction and exploitation, the Mundas exhibit a protective attitude towards their land and surroundings. Such behaviour has been made imperative by a deep-rooted distrust of the *dikus*' value systems and economic opportunism. This phenomenon is even traced back to the time of Chotti's forefather, Purti, whose story opens the novel. Purti had experienced at close quarters what it was to live in "resource-rich" areas. Gupta points out, "Uranium or coal, mica or iron, copper or manganese, all these minerals are found in abundance in tribal-dominated states"; besides, these areas are often drained by important rivers. Extractivist industry has therefore flourished in these regions, which has meant the large-scale acquisition of tribal land, by hook or crook. The post-independence elected Government of India has also acquired their land extensively, built big dams on their rivers, she adds, all "in the name of development", incurring a heavy toll of tribal displacement (49).

Chotti Munda's beginning also dramatizes this. Chotti's ancestor was displaced after coal and mica were found beneath the ground he lived on. Later, in the new home he settled in the forest, stone weapons emerged from his fields. He was evicted as "Stone Age arms give the *right* to the Government's Department of Archaeology" (3; ch. 1). Finding gold dust in the riverbed,

he recalls "how White men and *Biharis*[had] jumped at the sight of coal and mica, how instantly they disfigured *adivasi* areas with slums of tile-roofed dwellings. Who knows what such people will do if they see gold? These hills, these forests, this river will once again be spoiled" (4; ch. 1).[21] To avoid a repetition of the familiar cycle of unwanted intrusion, eviction, displacement, and ecological destruction following each such discovery, he considers his options and makes a difficult decision: "The Hindu enthusiastic sect Sadan, Christian missionary, and tea garden recruiters, all three want to get him. Purti Munda went in search of the recruiter". Of course, this sacrifice has little impact, because his fear that outsiders in search of gold would make the place all "mixed up" comes true nonetheless. The narrator observes how outsiders—people from other areas—are now settled there in large numbers, there is a railway line running through the place and a station for their benefit too (4; ch. 1).

Unlike Purti, however, Chotti knows there is no stopping change. His strategy—if we may call it that—is different. He is keenly alert to the changes around him. He sees the train station enlarged, the swelling settlements of outsiders. With this, the contrast between *diku* prosperity and *adivasis'* economic woes becomes more glaring, and he remarks to the *pahan:* "So th' earth kept all this brick, all this coal, all this fruit—for t'*Diku*? [...] No ... It's given to them who know ta take" (123–124; ch. 9). The *dikus'* knowing how to take has an accusatory ring in Chotti. The resource has always existed but the *adivasis* have seen it with different eyes than the outsiders. Chotti represents a change from his forefather in that he does not withdraw: "Here coal is above ground. We have to for coal quarryin' work as well. See, I never thought I'd say such a thing" (124; ch. 9). Though his heart aches at the destruction he sees happening

[21]See also Mahasweta Devi's story "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay, and Pirtha." A similar idea is echoed by the *adivasi* Shankar, appealing to the representatives of modernity: "We became unclean as soon as you entered our lives. No more roads, no more relief-what will you give to a people in exchange for the vanished land, home, field, burial-ground?," followed by a plea: "Can you move far away? Very far? Very, very far?" (120).

around him, he strategizes to suit the changing times in order to protect his community as best as he can.

Devi emphasizes the importance of a willingness to change as a means of resistance, citing the case of another *adivasi* community that traditionally has relied on hunting: "they have never done agriculture but they are doing it, this changefulness is resistance against globalization" (*"*Telling History" xiv). Her protagonist Chotti does not see leaving as a solution, nor does he hope for a change in outsiders' attitudes. He helps steer the change such that the Mundas and the similarly labouring outcaste Hindus can loosen the previously all-powerful Lala's grip on their lives a little, by finding work with the newcomers. So, even as these new jobs consist of "illegally killing trees, deforesting the hills and breaking stones to make morraine" (135; ch. 10), Chotti knows that if they do not do it, eager replacements from outside are all too ready to take their place.

1.1.3 Section Conclusion

The indigenous relationship with land is shown to involve a thinking beyond the categories of individual profit and resource, where it is better to trample money than the "granos de dios" (515; ch. V). In *Chotti Munda*, the Mundas manifest a protective attitude towards the land they till or inhabit. They often choose not to reveal things that they know will invite the avarice of outsiders and bring greater destruction. Both groups also exhibit strong affective ties to the land they work. By way of such contrasts presented between these communities and the dominant groups, both novels project an ethical higher ground for the indigenous/*adivasi*, and their subscription to a value system that operates outside mere self-interest and cold exchange.

The theme of "resource curse" emerges in both novels, and gains significance both in the context of Latin American states like Peru and India. In the former, this is because colonial and

postcolonial activity primarily centred around extractivist industries—whether precious metals, *guano,* or rubber. In the latter, because while "the adivasis inhabit most of the rich, natural resource regions, nearly 80 per cent of the minerals, 70 per cent of the forests and other natural resources" (Munshi 8), they ironically suffer from the highest levels of poverty. This shifts the emphasis from the knowledge of the existence of the concerned resources to the perspective and value systems of those concerned. As Chotti's remark makes clear, the resource is for those who *know* how to take. The *adivasis* have known but not wanted to make use of the resources in the manner that the *dikus* have.

Finally, while both novels are concerned about tracing change in the lives of these communities, what they also highlight is how little has actually changed overall for them. Land alienation and expropriation remains a central point of struggle even as both nation-states have shed the colonial yoke a long time back. In this sense, both Rumi's destruction at the end, and the closing scene of Devi's novel can be read as a throwback to the colonial past if in different ways. The first, as a re-enactment of the Spanish conquest; and the second as the possibility of a renewed *adivasi* uprising, reminiscent of the revolts in British India of the nineteenth century.

1.2 Indigenous and Tribals' Relationship to Nature

One aspect of these novels that assumes special contemporary resonance is its treatment of Nature and the Human. The forest, the animal world, the trees and birds are important elements in both narratives. We now look more specifically at these communities' ties with entities other than food-producing land. Their close links with, and understanding of their surroundings, more instinctual than intellectual, are a recurring motif in both novels. Nature as an entity by itself comes strongly into play in both texts. Peredo discusses Andean indigenous communities' rich traditions of reciprocity, which form part of a worldview encompassing relationships not only in

community with each other but a spiritual connection with Mother Earth and the natural environment. Relations of reciprocity, she points out, "extend beyond human beings. Celebrations of a sense of reciprocity and gratitude that include a relationship with the *Pachamama*—mother earth—and the *Wamanis*—the mountains—are major events in Indigenous Andean communities. In those ceremonies, goods such as potatoes, corn, coca and other products are offered as well as sacrifices of animals, in reciprocity for the benefits received from *Pachamama* and the *Wamanis*" (159-160). Both texts create an intimate attachment between Nature and the Human with respect to the indigenous and the *adivasis*. The line between the two is consistently blurred; mountains, animals, forest, river acquire human qualities, while the attributes of key characters frequently straddle both the human and the natural world. Rosendo and Chotti are excellent examples of this kind. This technique makes them appear not only larger than life but also enhances their symbolic value.

Importantly, in light of the special place given to non-human entitles within their systems and worldview, it also bestows the indigenous/*adivasi* subaltern with a new kind of protagonism, something along the lines of what Gleb Raygorodetsky has termed an 'archipelago of hope'. In his book with the same title, he highlights indigenous communities as humankind's best chance to remember, or learn, how to care for the Earth in a way that keeps it healthy for our descendants (xix). In these novels, it is the notion of interconnectedness that is privileged over that of hierarchies. Together with the use of anthropomorphism, and the attribution of the qualities of inanimate things to human beings, it helps decentre the anthropocentric vision and beliefs of modernity.

1.2.1 Man and Mountain, Myth and Modernity in El mundo

An identification between Nature and the Human, as well as the challenge to anthropocentrism, begin early on in *El mundo*, through descriptions of Rosendo and the mountains, each mirroring the other. Rosendo himself is "un poco vegetal, un poco hombre, un poco piedra [...] las duras colinas de los pómulos [...] un hombre con rasgos de montañas" (342; ch. I). Earlier, as he sits contemplating the mountains, he imagines them as human not just in form but also in motivation and access to uncommon knowledge: "el nevado Urpillau, canoso y sabio como un antiguo amauta; el arisco y violento Huarca, guerrero en perenne lucha con la niebla [...] el aristado Huilloc, en el cual un indio dormía eternamente [...] el rechoncho Suni, de hábitos pacíficos y un poco a disgusto entre sus vecinos [...]. [Rosendo] creía que los Andes conocían el emocionante secreto de la vida" (339 – 340; ch. I). Such a sensation of connection with the non-human world is seen also in less articulate but creative characters like the flautist Demetrio Sumallacta, who ponders over the *maguey* and its connection to the life of the Peruvian *indio* (897; ch. XX).

Non-human entities have traditionally occupied a privileged place in the *indigenist* novel's imagination. The horses of Benito and Augusto provide them companionship as well as any human. For Maqui, animals are little different from humans and their supposed lack of emotions is a lie (382; ch. I). This is amply seen in the long and loving descriptions of incidents involving Rumi's animals, such as the ox Mosco, who seemed like "un cristiano inteligente y bondadoso" (378; ch. I). Rosendo has an especially soft spot for him. Like humans, animals of a kind are also distinguished for their positive and negative traits in Rumi. For example, in sharp contrast to Mosco stands the bull Choloque, "un maldito [que] odiaba el trabajo y solamente le gustaba holgar con las vacas" (379; ch. I). Animals are also invested with agency and recognized for it. When Rosendo is asked to resolve a dispute over the ownership of a foal between two

people with identical mares, his solution is to let the foal decide for itself: "El potrillo conoce desde la hora de nacer el relincho de su madre y lo ha obedecido" (346; ch. I). Thus, animal affect is taken as an unmistakable sign of belonging, and valued as highly as human judgement.

The anthropomorphism of the natural world, as well as the attribution of Nature-like traits to the indigenous people, achieve a certain synthesis of these groups with their surroundings, focusing attention on their links rather than differences. Working in rubber extraction in the Amazon forest, Augusto Maqui will see "en ese vegetal [rubber tree] a un hermano de desgracia" (794; ch. XV). Through this perspective, the panorama of life is more horizontal than hierarchical; mountains, plants, animals and humans appear as if on a more level plane with complementary roles to play, challenging the supposed centrality of humans in the world, and by extension, the universal validity of anthropocentric systems.

The ideas of distance and proximity also come into play here: while Nature is shown as integral to the Andean indigenous conception of life, this also makes the divide from the value systems of the other side of the human world more glaring. A brief encounter with don Amenábar in chapter three leaves Rosendo fuming inwardly: "Por qué, señor, esa maldad? Maqui sintió que su pecho se le llenaba por primera vez de odio, justo sin duda, pero que de todos modos lo descomponía entero" (405; ch. III). The calm and wise Rosendo, who shortly before had been so at peace in his solitude amid the mountains, is suddenly overcome by disgust and hatred at what the *gamonal* represents. Interestingly, the mention of ties between the human and the non-human entities begin to recede following Rosendo's passing, and nearly disappears with Benito's return. This is significant because Benito is a messenger of modernity for the *comunidad*. His return itself is a telling contrast with Rosendo's walk back to Rumi in the opening chapter when the sight of the snake had left the old *alcalde* with a strong sense of

foreboding. Now, as Benito approaches Rumi after a prolonged absence, he tells himself "no es bueno anticipar malos acontecimientos" (903; ch. XXI), despite all the signs pointing to something not being quite right. Benito's main projects upon his return and his attempts to pull the community out from misery involve attacking deep-rooted beliefs of the *comuneros*: Yanañahui's supposedly enchanted lake, and a wicked spirit Chacho, who haunts its ruins. To him, these constitute unfounded superstition and are an impediment to "progress." Chapters twenty-one to twenty-four dwell on Benito's return and his stance on what is needed for the betterment of the community. The success of his projects is quickly sealed as we are told: "De veras, después de dos años de tenaz labor, el pueblecito se levantó allá, fuerte y cómodo, y la pampa estuvo llena de hermosas siembras" (928; ch. XXIII). At the end of this penultimate chapter, Benito is elected *alcalde* too. One sentence later, the next and final chapter begins, wherein even erstwhile detractors like Artemio Chauqui now rally behind him to resist a second dispossession of Rumi.

Yet, despite this apparent endorsement of Benito's projects, by aligning Rumi's beliefs with superstition and as opposed to "progreso" (927; ch. XXIII), he fails to represent his community culturally, because his ideology has more in common with that of the oppressors like Amenábar. Antonio Cornejo Polar observes that, paradoxically, the new ideals ushered in by Benito "coinciden en su base (pero por cierto no en sus intenciones y proyectos) con los que encuentran que el orden indígena tradicional es inconveniente para el desarrollo de una sociedad moderna de signo capitalista [...] en realidad él se inserta en el proyecto de lo que José María Arguedas denominó la "parte generosa" del mundo no indígena; es decir de los grupos sociales que combaten por una sociedad más justa" (*Literatura y sociedad* 78). The vocabulary used by Porfirio and Benito, to dismiss the beliefs of those who want hands off the enchanted sites, is

also suggestive. Such *comuneros* become like children who aren't as much at fault as they are naive. Their beliefs become "stories,""sham,""nonsense":

> Chauqui y otros sacaron la vieja historia de la mujer que salió a oponerse y otros cuentos. Los demás, po costumbre, dejaron que triunfara el engaño. No discuto que lo hagan con güena voluntá los que creen, pero eso no quita que sea zoncera. Vos, qué dices?
>
> -Eso, que es una tontería. (918; ch. XXII)

This conversation merits attention for its subjection of mythic belief to historical time[22]; for instance, nothing has happened to Valencio *so far* for making fun of the lakewoman and Chacho (919; ch. XXII). However, if seen in terms of the snake omen at the beginning of the narrative, the misfortunes manifest themselves in a series of events separated by gaps running into years. Are consequences always *immediate*? In other words, are consequences only so *when* they are immediate?

In this sense, we can reasonably ask if his dismissiveness of the mythic connection with Nature ("una laguna encantada con su mujer peluda y prieta y en un ridículo enano que tiene la cara como una papa vieja... ¿Hay derecho pa humillarse así?" [928; ch. XXIII]), and his unbridled march to "modernize" his community, accelerated—if not entirely caused—the second and final downfall of the community. His attempts at imposing a hierarchy of ideals brought from the outside, together with the violent end of the book, could be seen as providing material for a critique of the benevolent non-indigenous world he exemplifies, and thus resurrects the subaltern worldview to some extent, even in its destruction.

[22] I borrow the theme of mythic and historical time from Antonio Cornejo Polar. He delves into this theme with specific reference to this novel, and the shift from a mythic understanding of the world to a historical consciousness. According to him, with Benito Castro substituting Rosendo Maqui, the book moves towards "la quiebra del recurso mítico y la aparición de una conciencia histórica, objetiva, que explica los acontecimientos dentro de un orden causal que no requiere de ninguna apelación a las fuerzas sobrenaturales" (*Literatura y sociedad* 76).

1.2.2 Forest, and River as Witness in Chotti Munda

While the Mundas are mainly an agricultural community, like many other tribal communities, they have a profound relationship with the forest. Hunting, too, is an important part of their existence; it supplements their otherwise meagre diet. Chotti, as he becomes an accomplished archer and hunter in his youth, is responsible for his family's relatively prosperous position, partly because of the meat he gets home. The forest is also the Mundas' safekeeping place; it is where Dhani—forbidden from bearing bow and arrow by government orders—has stashed them away. Unlike the *dikus*, for them it is not a place of fear or the unknown. It is refuge for Dhani, Chotti's training ground under Dhani's guidance, and also where the radical leftist fighters—a group which includes some young *adivasi* men as well—build their hideout in the latter part of the novel.

Dhani is impatient to introduce the boy to the jungle, "our Mother" (14; ch. 2). Chotti, whose primary motivation had been the idea of learning to shoot arrows from the expert archer Dhani, acquires in the process a set of fresh eyes to see the world around him, and learns the interconnectedness of everything. For Dhani, the forest is a person. He seeks solitude and peace in her arms. Sometimes he goes quiet, and wants to be left alone. One such time, he tells Chotti the forest is crying because "Diku-Master-White man—together they've made me unclean, naked, undressed, clean me up" (17; ch. 2). The intimate connection with the forest is also reflected in how it marks change in the human world surrounding it: Dhani, for example, "counted his age by the measure of the two maturing and ageing cycles of the *sal* and teak trees in the forest—from his childhood to this day" (6-7; ch. 2). As time passes, the forest begins to reflect other changes in its surroundings as well. Successive phases in the novel follow the state of the forest in and around Chotti village, from "a lot of forest in those days. Hare-bear-deer-

hedgehog-partridge-pigeon—no dearth of meat," (12; ch. 2) to the forest department cutting down the ancient *sal* tree forest, the decline of game, and towards a situation where "if there are any animals left, they've gone off into deep forest for fear of the human" (145; ch. 10). Later in the novel there is apprehension that "our grandkids'll come o' age at such a time, that we'll not be able ta show them somethin' and say, we've seen [forest, river, mountain] too" (198; ch. 12).

The Mundas do not use their hunting tools, the bow and arrow, against female animals, who represent the reproductive entity. They show a long-term concern for continuity and renewal of life. Even Chotti's young son is admonished for shooting a female hare: "Let's not see that agin. T' fam'ly of life grows larger wit' girl animals, girl birds. Why do I make ye know girl critters and birds?"(89; ch. 7). Later, an older Chotti lets a doe escape as "they are bein' killed off like we are" (171; ch. 11). Once more, a horizontal Human-Nature solidarity and relationship is established.

Symbolically, Chotti's own name comes from that of a river. While that is customary for his clan ["in our line one is named after t' river"(40; ch. 3)], his name acquires special significance for its rootedness in the place where the story takes place—the Chotti area, named afterthe river that flows there. The river and the human merge in more ways than one. Chotti's wife notes this after his name begins to get connected to every event of importance, big or small, for the Mundas, and surface in their songs: "Ye're like that river Chotti. Not a deed of ours'swi'out t' river, and these folks caint do a thing wi'out ye" (88; ch. 7). Like the river, a symbol of continuity that is witness to the community's history through much change since the beginning, to his forefather's time, to the present, and onward, Chotti is also a witness, as well as a figure of continuity in the line of legendary fighters like Birsa and Dhani; at the same time, he also marks change for being unlike them.

1.2.3 Section Conclusion

It is notable that these novels should dwell so much on non-human entities. The careful attention to these groups' relationship with Nature is one of the more definitive markers of these communities' distinctness from other socioeconomic systems that dominate in their respective regions, and the ideological challenge they present to the latter. This aspect particularly resonates in the present when the ideas of "progress,""development" and "modernity" are under fire for their one-sided, non-egalitarian perspective, as well as the human and environmental cost incurred globally. This becomes more significant as ecocritical approaches[23] to reading texts gain prominence.

The *comunidad* in Rumi has a pronounced emotional bond with animals; in *Chotti Munda*, the Mundas abstain from hunting the female animals, for the principle of continuity and renewal they represent. The forest is always present in the backdrop of *Chotti Munda*, and change in the human world is also charted through the developments in the forest. From an initial abundance, there is a steady decline of game, the forest begins to noticeably recede due to the demand for timber and growth of other contracting jobs, and wildlife becomes a rare sight, eventually leading Chotti to suspect if future generations will get to see the forest and river which they had considered as givens.

Anthropomorphism is a recurring element in these novels, where mountains, forest, and animals acquire human qualities in the human imagination. They too suffer under human-

[23] See also *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. In the introduction to this collection, the editors underline the need for a sustained dialogue between postcolonial and ecocritical studies (DeLoughrey and Handley 24). Among the areas of overlap, they highlight how "the ecocritical interrogation of anthropocentrism offers the persistent reminder that human political and social inequities cannot be successfully and sustainably resolved without some engagement with the more-than-human world and with deep time. Although this challenge to anthropocentrism is often assumed to directly challenge the human social concerns of postcolonialism, both fields have made it clear that sustainability is a mutual enterprise that pertains as much to human social well-being as to the health of the physical world. If they are at odds, it is only because of our failure to consider their interdependencies [...] ecocritical postcolonialism attempts to imagine something beyond the confines of our human story, an imagination that is essential to modes of sustainability" (25).

induced oppression, which places them on a plane similar to these subaltern groups. More importantly, the two novels consciously reinforce the notion of Nature as an entity by itself. Besides, the identification and/or parallels between the Human and the non-human entities, whether living or non-living, challenge the anthropocentric vision of so-called modernity. At the same time, by giving these subaltern groups the leading role in raising these issues and questions, the texts represent them in powerful and meaningful ways especially when seen in relation to contemporary times.

1.3 Change, Adaptation, and Subaltern Consciousness

María Milagros López directs us to look for new forms and points of contestation. For her, as Ileana Rodríguez observes, "subalterns are not docile subjects. Docility and alienation are ways of seeing them from the outside, from domination—evident in her invocation of the 'jíbaro'sajá'—a popular phrase that expresses a form of subalterns' empty acquiescence to elite commands" ("Reading Subalterns" 17). It is helpful to take a cue from Milagros López, who is concerned about "social practices seldom considered by the Left, particularly those associated with the domestic, the subjective and the quotidian spheres" (Milagros López 64). The novels under consideration offer some instances of this kind. In *Chotti Munda*, for example, Chotti is said to "always make the signs of respect" when talking to authorities or those in positions of power, such as the police inchargeor Harbans. Yet, "there's no timidity in him," a quality that stands out (158; ch. 11). Under Chotti's influence and company, Chhagan and others too develop courage to sometimes take potshots at the *Lala*. For all his power over them, he is neither blind nor immune to their jests.

Land is a key factor around which the *comunidad* of Rumi, as well as the Mundas of Devi's novel, think themselves. However, their relationship to land, no matter the degree of

oppression at the beginning of the stories, is precarious at best. Their close attachment to land is always subject to threat from powerful forces beyond their control. Rumi *comuneros* know that other communities have disappeared and been swallowed up by *haciendas*. Community elders can point out to where previously "estuvo la comunidá tal y ahora es la hacienda cual" (351; ch. I). While they have become accustomed to living with uncertainty and change, that has not diminished their fears about losing more. Yet, some moments in each novel indicate a certain reconfiguration in this relationship, where they give up what is so dear to them as a mark of (unexpected) protest. They defy their attachment to land and place—although painfully—in the face of unrelenting oppression, taking even the oppressors by surprise. Such defiance is remarkable because this attachment is a defining feature of both communities depicted. In this way, they also exhibit resilience and an ability to adapt to changing conditions around them.

Besides looking at how defying expectations and predictability of their actions gives them an edge over the oppressor entities, we will also discuss their exercise of agency and resistance through adaptation to the new situations they face, and how these postpone, if not completely preempt, greater tragedies. Like the changing circumstances, subaltern consciousness is also represented as being in flux; they actively read and adapt to the changes taking place. These moments encourage us to rethink instances of coercion as also manifesting subaltern agency. It is in this context that we will examine the aspects of change, changefulness and adaptation in general as well as with reference to the subalterns' relationship with land.

1.3.1 Labour, Mobility as Strategies in Chotti Munda

The change from colonial to postcolonial times in *Chotti Munda* brings in the agenda of national development, modernization, and, with the advent of the 1970s, the criminalization of politics. Over time, we see other stakeholders enter the picture—proponents of industry like Harbans (the

brick kiln owner), forest and timber contractors, goons nurtured by political parties, as well as radical leftists like the *Naxalites.* Thus, the sociopolitical dynamic of the place becomesmore complex. These powers sometimes act in connivance, but more often, we see a process of negotiation, and not just a simplistic nexus, between them. While these changes do not dent the landowner's influence, they do weaken his hold.

Initially, since the communities represented are mainly landless, they are heavily dependent for work on the *Lala*. Chotti realizes that there is less work and abundant labour. He understands that with the availability of more hands than work, they are more or less at the Lala's mercy, and that if outsider workhands were to come in, it would only mean further misery for his people. Retaining their hold as labour force becomes key. Chotti succeeds at foiling Lala's plans of bringing in outside labour for his work. He strategically employs the legend or rumour of his "magic arrow." He frightens the middleman—entrusted with the task of bringing outside labour—with the legend of his magic arrow:

> Go ahead, bring labour, but you won' stay alive. [...]
>
> - Ye'll kill me?
> - There'll be nothin' in me hands. But me arrer will search ye out and pierce ye. You won' bring labour [...] Lala's pa couldn' escape even in Banaras. (165; ch. 11)

This middleman takes advance from the Lala for the purpose, but goes underground; thus is another disaster averted for Chotti's community.

As time goes by, Chotti village expands, a railway station comes up, the place becomes more connected and the numbers of outsiders and newcomers swell further. India's entrance into its independent era brings new industry in tow—brick kiln, colliery, timber contracting, etc.—and it is the cheap labour of the area (mainly *adivasis* and outcaste Hindus) that becomes the

main draw for these employers. The novel traces a transition from where employment avenues (and employers) for them were extremely limited and they had little option than to toil in the Lala's fields. Several things happen. Chotti manages to secure daily wage jobs with Harbans, and not just for his own but also Chhagan's group. "We've got out jest a bit from under Lala, got jobs in t' forest, jobs wit' Chadha. [...] We were in Lala's bite, I've moved his teeth a bit. He's mad angry,"Chotti observes to a family member (169; ch. 11). The Mundas (along with the outcaste Hindus) are able to reduce their dependence on *Lala* a little by diversifying and strategically working with other emerging players, such as Harbans.

Later, following the entry of Romeo and his associates—representative of the growing systematization of "lumpenization in the lower echelons of politics" (Devi, "Telling History" xiii)—Chhagan and others also protest the forcible 'cut' demanded from their wage by these ruffians. When Lala shows his inability to take action, they assert that only the bonded labour will work on his fields till the cut system remains in place. The non-bonded labourers seek work at a colliery some miles off for a better wage. There is a slight shift in emphasis at this stage, from portraying the misery of the *adivasis* due to their dependence on land owned by others, to the latter's dependence on labour for making use of the land and resources. This is a key realization for the subaltern group and plays an important role in its resistance. The dominant players' smugness is somewhat challenged as they worry over procuring labour, getting the work done and pre-empting other kinds of labour "trouble." In an unprecedented move, brick-kiln owner Harbans decides to pay the money demanded by political ruffians from his own pocket, instead of taking a "cut" from the labourers' wages as expected. Gradually, Chotti and Chhagan's groups come to realize that their very status as labour, ironically, is also their negotiating power. Without labour, all of Lala's land or Harbans' projects are no good.

Another significant event deals with the Mundas of Kurmi village, suffering under backbreaking taxation and humiliation at the hands of their estate manager. Some had been considering the idea of leaving the village and heading to a Christian Mission at some distance, that promised hope of (at least) economic salvation, although at the cost of religious conversion. But there was no consensus on it: "forsake the village and leave? New residents brought in? [...] Some had said, We'll give bond labour, we'll pay taxes, but we won' leave village". The final straw comes when the manager issues a prohibition on their beloved hunting festival. That is when they resolve to leave, but also play an "un-Munda like trick" before departure (81, 82; ch. 6). Little by little, they borrow food, "recklessly" giving thumbprints in return, meant to trap them further into unending cycles of debt and drudgery. Then they vacate the village overnight, making their way to the Mission. Yet, we are also told they did not leave easily:

> To set up a village by felling an impenetrable forest is a lot of work, a lot of pain. To leave that village is even more painful. Where is yer Mission? Does it have such hills, and such forests all around, like th' edge of mother's cloth?
>
> -No, but then there's also no manager. (80; ch. 6)

This instance represents a turning point in that it defies attachment to place in a way that underlines subaltern agency, while also showing non-customary behaviours to combat unbearable conditions of existence. Chotti is not happy with the adoption of this *diku*-like behaviour by these Mundas, and yet, he refuses to judge them harshly as he knows well the extremes they were driven to.

*1.3.2 Change for Continuity in*El mundo

Chapter one of Alegría's novel sees Rosendo recalling many events of the past, both from his personal and Rumi's collective history. One is the case of a *comunero* who had acquired a rifle

and begun hunting deer in the surrounding forest. Rumi inhabitants were divided about the behaviour, with an increasing number not in favour. "¿Cómo es posible [...] mate los venaos porque se le antoja? [...] ya que los venaos comen el pasto de las tierras de la comunidá, que reparta la carne entre todos" (344; ch. I). When the-then *alcalde,* Ananías Challaya, is unable to provide a satisfactory resolution to the complaint , Rosendo, then one of the *regidores*, resolves the question with some clear thinking:

> Los venaos no son de nadie. ¿Quién puede asegurar que el venao ha comido siempre pasto de la comunidá? [...] Los bienes comunes son los que produce la tierra mediante el trabajo de todos. Aquí el único- que caza es Abdón y es justo, pues, que aproveche de su arte. [...] los tiempos van cambiando y no debemos ser muy rigurosos. Abdón, de no encontrarse a gusto con nosotros, se aburriría y quién sabe si se iría. Es necesario, pues, que cada uno se sienta bien aquí, respetando los intereses generales de la comunidá. (344; ch. I)

This instance highlightsRosendo's progressive thinking, even as it is rooted in community values of the common good; he believes in following it in spirit and not as rigid custom. For him, the common good does not exclude respect for individual freedom and happiness. Here, he is able to demarcate the two while also conveying the message that being receptive to change and adapting to new conditions is imperative for the continuity of the community. Following this, several other *comuneros* also feel encouraged to acquire rifles for hunting.

Alegría's book also has the *comuneros* of Rumi choosing to move uphill to Yanañahui to escape becoming labourers in Amenabar's planned mine, at the time of the first displacement. For these cultivators whose existence is deeply connected to the land they till—economically *and* emotionally—the sacrifice of Rumi's arable lands for the rocky and difficult terrain further

up is a very high price to pay. This first displacement of the community also represents a moment of (peaceful) defiance, when fertile land is left behind in order to retain their freedom. However provisionally, the move to Yanañahui, as well as the exodus of several inhabitants who leave for other places, foils Amenábar's plans. They defy his assumption that being deeply invested in their land, they will have no choice but to stay back in Rumi and become his *property*, to be used and exploited at will. This miscalculation gives an act of seeming non-resistance a tone of disobedience as it challenges the predictability of subaltern action. The despairing finale of near-annihilation with the men of Rumi either killed or wounded, signals a loss for Amenábar too, since he will not have the labour force he wished to secure.

Successive leaders of the community too indicate changes. Rosendo's prudence, courage and expressiveness is a big change from his predecessor whose "método más socorrido de gobierno era [...] el de guardar silencio" (344; ch. I). Later, Benito exhibits a starkly different style of leadership from Rosendo. These aspects are not unlike what we see in *Chotti Munda*; both texts fight the tendency of perceiving these communities and their members in a state of stasis. In Yanañahui, with Benito's return, the *comuneros* develop hopes of a new future under his guidance. They come to embrace his brand of leadership, markedly different from the ones before. Rosendo's big project for the community had been his dream of a school for the children, where they could have the education that would give them access to a world as yet remote for them. He believed schooling for the children in learning to read, write and count would be emancipatory for the community: "bueno era saber" (353; ch. I). While Benito agrees with the need for a school, he does not consider it a priority. For him, the beginning had to be made another way under the reigning circumstances. There was no time to wait ten or twenty years for

a school to begin showing results (922; ch. XXIII). In his judgement, there are other communal tasks requiring more urgent action.

A sea change from Rosendo, Benito's thinking brings to mind for the contrast it offers, the beginning chapters of the book where we saw the old *alcalde* climb up and make offerings to "*taita* Rumi" to find out if the *community* would fare well in the new place (641; ch. IX). The narrator had previously also drawn attention to the complexity of Rosendo, "esta mezcla de catolicismo, superstición, panteísmo e idolatría" (385; ch. I). On the other hand, Benito incarnates a changed dynamic of man and nature: "tenía que surgir una concepción de la existencia, que sin renegar de la profunda alianza del hombre con la tierra, lo levantara sobre los límites que hasta ese momento había sufrido para conducirlo a más amplias formas de vida" (921; ch. XXIII). In his imagination, it is the human will that needs to be the dominant principle.

1.3.3 Section Conclusion

In this section, we discussed instances from both novels that belie subaltern docility and predictability. Surrounded by change and in view of the seriousness of the oppression they are subject to, the members of the two communities show a remarkable ability to adapt, sometimes even radically reconfiguring their customary behaviours in the interest of survival. This is evident in their defiance of their attachment to place; in *Chotti Munda*, the Munda community of a particular village vacates home overnight and moves away to register their protest against the manager's abusive practices. In Alegría's novel, the *comuneros* of Rumi choose to move uphill to the cold Yanañahui instead of staying put in their beloved community and become labour for the *gamonal.* There is an underlying understanding that adaptation is imperative for their continuity. This is especially seen in the leaders of these groups. Chotti's agility of mind helps the Mundas weaken the Lala's hold over their lives when they manage to retain their place as

labour in the area against his threats to bring in workhands from outside. Later, as modernizing forces enter the fray, Chotti helps them strategically diversify their dependence, slightly loosening the Lala's grip on his community and others. Meanwhile, Rosendo demonstrates progressive thinking which does not dismiss the possibility of the common good and individual freedom being mutually inclusive. These examples show that one of the novels' significant contributions is to highlight the fluidity and flux of subaltern thinking.

1.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the systems and underlying beliefs of the indigenous *ayllu* of Rumi depicted in *El mundo*, and the Munda *adivasi* community in *Chotti Munda*. We have also seen in some detail, sociologically speaking, the intimate relationship that both the Peruvian indigenous and the Mundas share with land, forest and Nature in general. It has been commented how deeply their identities are enmeshed with these entities. Finally, in the light of these, we saw how change—mostly in the form of threats—and oppression in these novels also brings out resistant and/or strategic responses from these groups in these novels. The continuity of these oppressive structures in the two countries' postcolonial era besides the addition of newer threatening avenues makes it relevant to discuss how these novels provide (or not) empowering portrayals of these groups.

To sum up, there are three main ways subaltern resistance is underlined in context of the above aspects. First, their systems—whether existing or past—provide a glimpse into their underlying beliefs. More often than not, in the novels, these beliefs and value systems trump those associated with the oppressive entities. For example, both Rumi's *ayllu* system and the Mundas' ancient *khuntkatti* ways value the common good over individual gain. Their relationship to land and work is also based on affective ties (land and forest are not "resources"),

and spurs happiness and enthusiasm. All this puts these subaltern groups on a higher ethical plane and makes the case for an ideological resistance against the powers that be.

Second, the use of anthropomorphism destabilizes the human-centric worldview of modernity. The indigenous/*adivasi* relationship with Nature and forest is another significant marker of their difference from the dominant structures. While the idea that these communities live and operate in greater harmony with nature is not new, and has often been taken to the extreme of exoticising them, these novels convey a more sincere and nuanced relationship between the indigenous and their surroundings. Ways of life that are more directly and visibly dependent on the natural environment are unlikely to avoid forming such connections. Their concern for the well-being of non-human beings and entities finds special resonance in the present-day world, and carves out a new kind of protagonism for these communities.

Finally, change is a reality in the lives of these groups in the novels under consideration. They cannot avoid change, but certain instances in both books provide evidence that their acts are a negotiation rather than simply submission to pressure. Certain key points (such as using their proletarianization to strategically diversify their employment options in *Chotti Munda*) indicate a certain defiance. Subaltern leadership is shown to rise to the occasion and display dynamism and a disposition toward changefulness in the interest of resistance. When looked at in comparison, *El mundo* offers fewer examples of the kind, and they tend to occur more sporadically; this process is more sustained and organic in *Chotti Munda*. This could partly be attributed to the fact that, for a goodpart of the narrative, the community in *El Mundo* is not under the active leadership of Rosendo (who is jailed not long after the first displacement), or Benito (who only returns, in a way, at the beginning of the end).

Chapter 2: Memory and Orality as Strategies of Resistance

This chapter will dwell on history and memory, orality, and continuity in the two novels, themes that have a central place in the subaltern contestation of mainstream, hegemonic discourse. Remembering their history, in their way(s), is crucial for these subaltern groups to maintain a sense of self and fight marginalization. In his manifesto for the Subaltern Studies Group, Ranajit Guha underlined the central prejudices that inform the mainstream historiography of colonial India and the nationalist movement. He points out how the domain of the "politics of the people," dominated by subaltern classes and groups, had always existed but was consistently left out of the elite's writing of history. A legacy of pre-colonial times, this domain, he says, "continued to operate vigorously in spite of [colonialism], adjusting and adapting itself" ("*On Some Aspects"* 40). For example, the figure of Dhani in Devi's novel reminds us of this active but sidelined domain, while the book also traces a connection and continuity from the historical leader Birsa Munda to the fictive Chotti, highlighting the past struggles of the *adivasi* subaltern *and* bringing them into the present.

These novels draw attention to the subalternity of these communities not just in terms ofthe difference in the content of their histories but also for their distinctive ways of recording, practising, and passing history on. In fact, it is this latter aspect that increasingly gains prominence. The orality of these *adivasi* and indigenous societies is an important marker of their difference from the mainstream, and the texts emphasize this, whether through the transcription of songs (*Chotti Munda*) or through (hi)stories narrated orally within the plot (*El mundo*). We shall see how orality enables resistance and functions as a source of hope. Here, we should also be alert to the points of contact between writing and orality, without forgetting their differences. Recording and remembering—oral *or* written—serves as a source of hope for continuity.

Recounting how *Chotti Munda* was born of her experiences gathered over years of travelling through *adivasi* areas, Devi says: "It struck me then, I have to write about the tribals, I have to, because these things will vanish [...]. And thus came *Chotti Munda"*("Telling History"xii). This points to the writer conceiving of her novel as a document of hope, with a belief in the power of imaginative writing to somehow delay a process of destruction that is in motion. This is not far from how the *adivasi*/indigenous subaltern communities use song-making and storytelling in the novels themselves. The Mundas in Devi's novel employ songs to record their small triumphs over the dominant forces; the fox-and-rabbit tale narrated by a Rumi storyteller allows the rabbit (who could be seen as symbolizing the indigenous) to repeatedly outwit the stronger fox.

The writing/orality aspect gains further significance for the fact that we are reading novels about these communities. For Cornejo Polar, the indigenist novel re-enacts the writing/orality confrontation, exemplified, for him, in the Cajamarca[24] incident that marks the symbolic beginning of Spanish colonization of Incan Peru (*Writing* 13-14). For him, the indigenist novel contains a tension at its centre—its "heterogeneity," the problem of representing the indigenous world through modes that are actually alien to it. As he puts it:

> By its heterogeneous straddling of two very different sociocultural worlds, the Indigenist novel of the time [...] does not have the tools to effectively process the conflict from which it arises and on which it is built. It reproduces the internal conflict of divided and unintegrated nations that history cannot resolve. Although paradoxical, the great truth of

[24] For Cornejo Polar, the sixteenth century interaction, or "dialogue" between Inca ruler Atahualpa and Spanish priest Vicente Valverde at Cajamarca, and the subsequent capture and execution of the former, is a scene symbolic of the mutual incomprehension between the worlds of orality and writing: "the point at which orality and writing do not merely reveal their differences but evidence their mutual estrangement and their reciprocal, aggressive repulsion (*Writing* 13-14). For this Peruvian critic, this deep-rooted tension between the two remains unresolved in contemporary Latin America.

Indigenism—and above all the Indigenist novel—rests not so much on what it says as on the real contradictions that it reproduces. (145)

Owing to the oral nature of these subaltern societies on the one hand, and the textuality of the novel on the other, no attempt novels make can adequately communicate the experience; nor are they likely to find an audience among the members of these groups. The Peruvian critic's discussion prompted acknowledgement that the novel—as a specific kind of written cultural artefact—is not well-placed to provide a "view from the inside" of such indigenous worlds, a point that had long been the focus of most criticism of Alegría's novel, whether laudatory or unfavourable (Troncoso 47).

And although this problem limits the possibilities of such representation, it also calls attention to the ways in which these books negotiate their way around this contradiction inherent in their very being. As we shall see, they mainly use two techniques, with varying degrees of success: a) weaving oral forms into the text; b) self-conscious revelations of such heterogeneity and/or underlining the limits of their attempts at representation.

The importance of reflection on the modes, methods and silences of any knowledge-production is also underlined in Spivak's observations on the Subaltern Studies project. Vinayak Chaturvedi, in an essay charting the evolution of the project, states how, for Spivak, "it was pertinent to deconstruct the Subalternists' mode of deconstruction as a way to prevent both the 'objectification' of the subaltern and the 'control' of the subaltern subject through the construction of historical knowledge about subalternity" (16). Thus, even when our novels "rescue" subalterns' place in history, we have to bear in mind the levels of mediation involved—as they are forms of translation of an indigenous/*adivasi* world the writers do not originally hail from, capturing in writing ways of life and worldviews that are primarily "lived" orally, an

imposition of a genre alien to these subaltern groups' own cultural production—and by extension the texts' distance from the world depicted. However, we shall see how both authors attempt to uncover the always-inadequate communication between writing and orality, in an exercise in self-reflexivity and deconstruction. This chapter will examine how, working within the limitations of the form employed, these authors attempt to overcome such limitations in creative ways and approximate a more nuanced view of the subaltern groups in question.

The passage of oral history is depicted via the pairings of Rosendo/Benito and Dhani/Chotti, in *El mundo* and *Chotti Munda*, respectively. The transition from one to the other is beset with change, in varying degrees. Examining this play between the old and the new will also provide us with a way to gauge the success (or failures) of subaltern agency and empowerment.

2.1 Against Forgetting:Telling Subaltern History

Both *El mundo* and *Chotti Munda* are deeply concerned with history and how that history is recounted. In each novel, the theme of remembering and transmitting history is given singular importance, whether as a means to ensure the continuity of the groups in question, to foster hope of future revolution, as a cautionary tale against hostile groups, or to instill cultural pride. In this section, we look at the role of memory in these subaltern communities in the preservation of their history and the forms memory takes in their context. We also discuss how the inter-generational sharing of memory in these books may aid a sense of subaltern resistance. What is the relevance of gaps in memory and in what ways does it impact the subalterns' history?

In *Chotti Munda*, the language of the Mundas (*Mundari*) has no script, as the text frequently reminds us. Theirs is an oral culture. The indigenous community of Rumi—while their speech may have shifted from Quechua to Spanish—is rooted in orality, too. Both books

highlight how these oral societies record history: they preserve it in the memory of their living members. And this memory, which they share through the spoken word—whether by retelling past events, or by singing songs—becomes their means of communicating their history and knowledge to the next generation. As we shall see, one important emphasis in these novels is the attempt to redress some of the historical amnesia that afflicts the mainstream, whether concerning *adivasi* society and its presence in the political life of India in *Chotti Munda*, or the continuing conditions of oppression and degradation of Peru's vast indigenous populations.

Also, since (unwritten) human memory is the container of history here, it brings about certain peculiarities in its transmission, too. For instance, the style of sharing history is conditioned by the container, resulting in a perceived "disorder" or unstructured format. A prime (and the main) example of this is Rosendo Maqui in chapter one of Alegría's novel, which we shall discuss at some length. As human memory fades, and forgets things over time, this history is inevitably subject to gaps besides other contingencies. In what ways does such memory aid subaltern resistance in these novels? We shall see that it is by foregrounding this "remembered" memory—its substance as well as the particular form it gives to these groups' histories—that these novels challenge official historical discourses. The texts in question also, on several occasions, self-consciously (or not) undercut their own authority, and draw attention to their conflictive belonging to a written culture portraying an oral one.

2.1.1 Seizing Serpentine Memories in El mundo

In *El mundo*, the past is shared with us—the readers—largely through a glimpse into Rosendo Maqui's memories in the opening chapter. We can situate Rumi's past and present through the *alcalde's* thoughts flowing back and forth in time. He realizes with a start that he may perhaps be the only one who remembers many of the stories and events of the community's past. He

wonders: “Y si se muriera de repente? En verdad [...] había relatado abundantes acontecimientos pero nunca en orden. Lo haría pronto, durante las noches en que mascaban coca junto a la lumbre” (347; ch. I). The trigger for this chain of thoughts is an anxiety about Rumi’s future when he spots a snake, a bad omen, which sets him thinking, remembering, and reflecting. It is anxiety about the community’s future that directs his gaze to the past, and then to the question of transmitting knowledge— historical and cultural—to the next generations.

Nécker Salazar Mejía has discussed Andean and Amazonian memory as it appears in Alegría’s novel, in the context of land expropriation, injustice and oppression in the Andes, as well as the conquest of the forest and the rubber boom in the Amazon. For him, *El mundo,* which he calls “un gran mural de la historia del país, de sus fracturas y contradicciones” (70), “contribuye a la recuperación de la historia y la memoria local como un aspecto vital en la construcción de la nación peruana” (65-66). The testimonial and historiographic narratives incorporated into the text, whether in the voices of the various characters or recounted by the omniscient narrator, he says, “tienen por finalidad revelar la realidad social desde la perspectiva del sujeto marginal y plantean una versión de los hechos que difiere notablemente de la historia oficial” (66). Thus, the memory of Rosendo (and Rumi, by extension) is imbued with a perspective of history from below. Threats and/or experiences of land dispossession, displacement, forced labour, heavy taxation, etc. are part of their everyday. Rosendo’s anxieties about the community’s uncertain destiny are not only informed by an omen, but grounded in such realities, which surface both through fragments of oral memory received from ancestors, as well as from the concrete observation of seeing surrounding communities disappear.

In Latin America, the second half of the twentieth century, marked by repressive dictatorships across the region, also turned out to be a time for the re-discovery and new-found

legitimacy of non-archival sources of memory and oral testimony in the mainstream, as a way to approach aspects of the past suppressed in official discourses. Memory studies, according to Elizabeth Jelín, emerged as a field in the late 1990s "a partir de un encuentro con la realidad de la práctica política de los actores sociales, más que desde preocupaciones analíticas o disciplinarias"; moreover, "fue la idea de que era necesario 'para no repetir' la que motivó el desarrollo de investigaciones académicas" (qtd. in Daona 132). The idea of remembering so as to not forget, and beware unfortunate repetitions, is prominent in Rumi's thought as well. Chauqui's words about the landowners and the institution of law, for example, are etched in communal memory:

> Cada día, pa pena del indio, hay menos comunidades. Yo he visto desaparecer a muchas arrebatadas por los gamonales. Se justifican con la ley y el derecho. ¡La ley!; ¡el derecho! ¿Qué sabemos de eso? Cuando un hacendao habla de derecho es que algo está torcido y si existe ley, es sólo la que sirve pa fregarnos. [...] ¡Comuneros, témanle más que a la peste! (350; ch. I)

Indeed, Chauqui's words of caution about the law as an instrument to manipulate the truth in favour of the powerful and aid further oppression for the indigenous population, are always lurking in the community subconscious as Rumi goes to trial to defend its land. The notion of yesterday in this memory, carries the weight and experience of not only years, but centuries, as Rosendo reflects: "Mañana, ayer. Las palabras estaban granadas de años, de siglos. El anciano Chauqui contó un día algo que también le contaron" (350). What this memory lacks in detail, it makes up for in breadth. Here, Rosendo owes his memory to Chauqui but also traces it further back to the elders. Memory, then, becomes present in the here and the now through this personal

connection ("Como tras una niebla veía aún al viejo Chauqui"[347]) but is legitimated further by tracing its origins to a more remote past.

Meanwhile, as Rosendo admits, many things have faded or been forgotten with time; yet, the passage of time has also erased "los detalles superfluos y las cosas se le aparecían nítidamente" (347; ch. I). This history, preserved in memory, is thus human and living. In the contrast it offers, this remembered history also presents a challenge to the *papeleo* of the legal world the *comuneros* are forced to interact with. During the court proceedings, we find Rosendo exhausted by the written word; he feels "perdido en ese mundo de papeles" and fears that "todos los legajos y expedientes [...] terminarían por ahogarlo [...] por perder a la comunidad. Muchos papeles, innumerables. Muchas letras, muchas palabras, muchos artículos" (567; ch. VII). By contrast to his memory, which has with time served to illuminate the essential, the excess of the written word seems to Rosendo a way to hide, rather than reveal, the truth. Besides, papers are easily manipulated or destroyed in favour of the interests of the powerful.

Rosendo seems to make a mental note to share these stories with other *comuneros*,to prepare future tellers among the young (he thinks his son Abram has good judgement for the purpose), and perhaps do so in a more orderly fashion than hitherto. But is the disorderliness of the sharing of this past necessarily a setback, or could it be a strength? By delving into his memories and retrieving particular fragments from the past in no particular order, is not Rosendo constructing a view of history from below, not just in what he tells but also how he tells it? Even if he is unaware of it, as readers following Rosendo's meandering thought process, we observe that such perceived disorder is itself a structure peculiar to orality. In this sense, Rosendo introduces a pattern of resistant history-making *and* resistant history-telling in the text.

Rosendo's style of "nunca en orden" partly applies to the form of Alegría's narrative itself. Following the first displacement in chapter eight, alternate chapters are devoted to following the stories of Rumi emigrants and their fates beyond the *comunidad*. There is a to and fro between life in the community and that in Peru at large, experienced through the eyes of the emigrants. In this way, the story threads together the *sierra-selva-costa* of the country, and we find that rather than just telling the tale of one community of the Andes, the book ends up narrating the fates of a broad swath of Peru's oppressed, mainly the indigenous peoples, whether Andean or of the Amazonian lowlands, but also the workers in general. The book visits the Amazon through Rosendo's son Augusto in chapter fifteen, bringing into focus the inhumane and exploitative practices that powered the rubber boom in the region. There is also a glimpse into Amazonian folklore and even a history lesson on the nineteenth-century colonial inroads into the forest. Chapter seventeen then transports us to Benito's time in Lima.

Novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, in his prologue to a later edition of the book suggests that this novel "vino, en cierta forma [...] a proponer una imagen novelesca representativa del Perú a la manera clásica" (7), partly filling such a void in Peruvian literature. However, the choice of such a structure could also be seen—and more effectively for our purposes—in the light of Antonio Cornejo Polar's discussion of what he terms the *resistance* exercised by the indigenous referent against the alien literary system trying to represent it:

> si bien, en un primer movimiento la producción de la novela indigenista exige una cierta adecuación del referente a las condiciones que se le imponen desde fuera [...] en un segundomovimiento [...] todo el proceso de producción se modifica por presión del referente, modificación que se traduce en las peculiaridades formales. (*Literatura y sociedad* 70)

In this sense, we might say that Alegría adopts a meandering style that mimics the workings of memory, to tell a story more in keeping with the methods of this distinct sociocultural universe.

The novel also contains many references to events from mainstream history. This includes significant incidents from Peru's then-recent history, such as the War of the Pacific (1879 - 84) fought between Chile, Bolivia, and Peru. These overlaps help to see the other side of the same event. Because in the novel we receive these histories filtered through the memory of Rosendo and/or other *indios,* it provides a different perspective on such central markers of official Peruvian history, including instances of comic confusion that undercut the seriousness of the affairs of the *patria*. For instance, Rosendo recalls how for a long time the *comuneros* were under the impression that Chile was an enemy general (359; ch. I). But more detailed are his memories of the subsequent civil war between the "*azules*" and the "*colorados,*" whose impact on the community was much greater and more intimate, as members of both sides freely exploited Rumi, forcibly recruiting its men, raping young women, and unleashing a general feeling of terror. In fact, Benito is among the children born of the trauma suffered by the community's women in this time.

Overall, however, the book gives priority to indigenous history and its revolts; this is the thread that eclipses the events of "national" history. Rosendo recalls the suppression of a tax on the indigenous, but the uprising that supposedly led to the recall is vague in his mind: "Unos dijeron en el pueblo que la suprimieron porque se habían sublevado *un tal Atusparia y un tal Uchcu Pedro*, indios los dos, encabezando un gran gentío, y a los que hablaron así los metieron presos" (351; ch. I; emphasis mine). The story of Pedro Pablo Atusparia and Uchcu Pedro[25] is remembered in Alegría's book at different moments: by Rosendo, by the *peones* on *haciendas*,

[25] Pedro Pablo Atusparia was a peasant leader and one of the leading lights of an indigenous uprising that took place in 1885 in Peru's department of Áncash. The rebellion was mainly to protest increased taxation, in the economically-fraught period following the civil war (1883-85) and the War of the Pacific (1879-83).

and by Benito, including and significantly, towards the very end. What draws our attention is that beginning with Rosendo's vague idea of the event, it is through Benito that we learn about it more clearly. He is the one who hears other *indios* tell stories of rebellion and resistance in times gone by, "de héroes casi legendarios, de luchadores astutos y tremendos" (535; ch. VI), and especially the Atusparia-led uprising of 1885. These are the histories that are significant in the context of the community, which is why they are revisited over and over. We are told also that Rosendo "confunde un tanto las peripecias personales con las colectivas" (347). His earliest memories from childhood, and his becoming the mayor of his community, are interlaced with Rumi's own history. There is no clear demarcation between the individual and the community; each derives sustenance from the other. Rumi's becomes a mixed history that moves back and forth in time and blurs the line between the protagonism of the individual and the community. And yet, it is this "confusion" that makes community living, and shared community values, possible. Individual stories affect the psyche of the collective just as overarching events impact each one. The chapter about Rosendo's time in prison gives a sense of history having come to a stop as life "se advierte fundamentalmente estafada [...] los días pasan y pasan y tornan a pasar formando el tiempo de veras perdido." This stagnation of memory and time is death; it is then tragically symbolic that Rosendo dies isolated from his land and his people, beaten to death while living a prisoner's life, "encontrándola completamente estéril, negada a toda creación" (820, 824; ch. XVI).

2.1.2 Parroting the Past in Chotti Munda

While *El mundo* opens with Rosendo's anxiety about sharing memories, and through them, transmitting something of Rumi's history, in *Chotti Munda*, the protagonist Chotti actually gets the chance to have Dhani Munda walk him along the path of the history of Munda resistance

through memory. This makes for a marked difference between the two novels, as local sharing of historical memory also manifests itself in practice in Devi's work.

After the novel's brief first chapter where Chotti is seventy-eight (the same scene and time as the novel's culmination), we are transported back to his formative years. In his adolescence, during a time of drought, he had gone to live at his sister's marital home; this is where he met Dhani, one of the elders of the household. Chotti's dream was to win the archery contest at the grand village fair. The young Chotti is drawn to Dhani, to the mystery that surrounds him and to his fame as an expert archer. Meanwhile, Dhani begins to see in Chotti an ally he can train for the future by leaving in him traces of his memory, and the second chapter is devoted to their blossoming comradeship. An enduring bond is created between the 15-year-old Chotti andthe 80-year-old Dhani, laying the ground for the projection of history as a continuum in this novel. This small act of "teaching as infinite relay" is, for Spivak, "the very spine of historical change" (Afterword 333). The young boy "didn't know that the new epic of Munda lifehad been created twenty years ago. Dhani tells him. As a result of the relationship that grows between him and Dhani, Chotti also becomes a part of the epic, and his ultimate destiny becomes as enormous and suggestive as that of epic heroes" (9; ch. 2). Stephen Morton argues that this epic storytelling mode privileges Chotti Munda's point of view and the perspective of the community he represents. In adopting this mode to recount a history of subaltern resistance to marginalization and exploitation, he adds, "Devi underlines the importance of her subject and the lives of the adivasis" (164). The epic characteristics of Chotti's story—stretching out into a mythic ancestor at the beginning, "an open frame at both ends" (Devi,"Telling History" xi), a broad array of characters, the length of time the narrative spans especially due to this first characteristic—imbues its non-regal protagonists, notably Chotti and Dhani, with an aura not

unlike that of the well-known epics of the region. In this sense, Devi plays with the conventions of not just the form of the novel (in her language Bengali, the novel is born around the mid-nineteenth century), but also the more domestically-rooted tradition of epic narrative.

Dhani had participated in the historic armed uprising led by legendary Munda leader Birsa at the turn of the nineteenth century, against the combined oppression of British colonial authorities and *dikus'* (non-*adivasi* outsiders) infiltration into their territories. The revolt was crushed; Birsa, who had attained god-like status in the community, was jailed and died shortly after. Dhani, who was in jail with Birsa, continues to believe that Lord Birsa will return. Though old, he is not defeated in spirit and maintains his rebel status in other ways, commanding fearful respect even from the police. However, since the revolt and his jail term, his freedom of movement has been heavily curtailed by the authorities. But what the old man laments most is the lack of listeners to hear his tale of Munda resistance: "It's a long story. I want to tell t' tale, but there's no one to listen. And t' Munda folk here are broken-backed, livin' on t' kindness of t' Diku-Hindus" (10; ch. 2). In teaching Chotti, Dhani finds hope of redressing his grievance. Besides, it gives him purpose and a meaningful way to channel his anger: "Dhani felt driven somehow. [...] There was some terrific haste somewhere inside Dhani. Otherwise why teach Chotti all this?" (14; ch. 2). He trains the boy in not just the art of bow and arrow, but also "to parrot" the tale of Birsa. By telling the tale to Chotti, Dhani circumvents the restriction on his movement and behaviour, and plants the seed to keep alive Munda historical memory.

An important part of subaltern memory is to pass on the lessons learnt through struggle; in Devi's novel, one of these is the need to rise in rebellion, recognizing that "one must [kill humans], from time to time" (18; ch. 2). This last reference is to what Dhani considers the "real instruction." It represents a radical call to violent combat; this is an idea that, when it issues forth

in relation to these subaltern groups, frequently polarises opinion in mainstream modern readers, especially in print and mass media contexts. However, here, shielded by fictionality and embedded in the context of Dhani's memory, as the fruit of his experience gained through protracted suffering, it creates space for a more complex view. The reader, like Chotti, may be left exasperated ("Kill humans!"[19; ch. 2]) and little convinced by Dhani's teaching. Yet, the latter's memory here serves to highlight the continuity of abuse and oppression of these groups, which Chotti will realize throughout his own time and transitions. What Chauqui had said, Rosendo and his community experienced first-hand; here, Chotti will realise the depth of Dhani's teaching, as it comes true nearly word for word: "If such a day comes ye too will kill. And yes, raise Dhani Munda'sname and kill. I'll be at peace then" (19). This is not to say that the book valorises or endorses violence; what it does do, by employing (oral) personal testimonies such as those of Dhani to Chotti, is it places subaltern violent political action in context, showing oppressive realities on the ground as its motor. Among the distinctive features of the domain of subaltern politics in Guha's conception, is "the experience of exploitation and labour [that] endowed this politics with many idioms, norms and values which put it in a category apart from elite politics," ("On Some Aspects" 41). The violence in Devi's novel is explicitly depicted as coming not from the people, but from the prevailing conditions in which they find themselves.

We are told of Dhani's long career in armed struggle, in the hope that the Mundas would establish villages in forest and arable land and farm rightfully and in peace, and that other *adivasi* groups would do the same. He had fought in several prominent rebellions of the nineteenth century, the revolts of the Santals, the Kherwar revolt, the *Mulkoi* revolt, and finally Birsa's *Ulgulan* (14; ch. 2). Instead of the "successful" non-violent freedom struggle that India's official history tends to underline, Devi's novel puts the focus on these other, "failed," violent

uprisings further back in time, which had fought against the double bind of domestic as well as foreign colonialism. The Mundas' memory helps retrieve histories, those which mainstream discourse would rather forget so as to avoid acknowledging its continued failure to meet these demands. When they do find mention, the "default" national history of independence and its key players are a distant spectacle, mostly incomprehensible and expressed in anachronistic terms such as the reference to "King Gandhi" here:

> In 1930 a new scene could be seen. Police in some of the compartments. The passengers wear white caps.
>
> [...] These Dikus are t' followers of King Gandhi.
>
> [...] Who's that?
>
> Do I know? All say a great king.
>
> These're followers?
>
> Yes mate. Raising reva-lutions ta chase off t' White man. So they're taken to je-hell everywhere.
>
> So! So many Diku! No end to them. (57; ch. 5)

Here, Chotti's attention falls not on the "revolution" or its apparent aims, but the hordes of *dikus* he sees passing, thus shifting the emphasis from the white colonial master to the more immediate threat they see in their everyday life, the non-white diku. This is also a premonition—again, rooted in past and present unpleasantness—of the struggles that await his community in the postcolonial phase even after the White master has been chased away.

The book has a telling refrain: "All's a story in Chotti Munda's life" (22; ch. 3). It self-consciously notes that the Munda language has no script, and that this is a community that turns significant events into story, and holds them as saying, as song: "That's their history as well"

(23). Repeated often, this makes the orality of their language and history a central aspect of the story. Emphasizing the living nature of this unwritten history, Devi points out how her own writing is indebted to it: "I had to learn [this history] by being with the people [...] this song continues, then another phase, another song, these songs are sung here and there—that it continues to live, this is also resistance. Thus they are making the thing alive" ("Telling History" xi). Indeed, after Dhani's death—shot and killed after violating the prohibition on his free movement—it is in this form that he *returns* to Chotti Munda: "When he got Dhani back in song and story, he became human again" (23). There is yet another time when Chotti "gets back" his mentor: in the final scene of the novel. In a moment of an uncharacteristically public defiance, and to prove the seriousness of his warning to the figures of authority against raising terror in the village, he shoots an arrow—Dhani's magic arrow. Right before shooting, he says "fast in the language of the Mundas, Dhani Munda! I'm raisin' yer name an' shootin' yer arrer today. To stay true, meself to meself. Chotti comes before the target with light and fast footsteps. And tells everyone, No fear y'all. Then he shoots, into the target. Then he waits, unarmed" (326; ch. 16). With this act, Chotti symbolically lets loose the "magic," the legacy, teaching and memory of Dhani, and awakens the crowd at large to the possibility of rebellion against injustice. Thus, as long as they remain in Munda story and song, and by extension, in Munda memory, the characters and what they represent metaphorically continue to defy annihilation.

2.1.3 Section Conclusion

In these novels, living human memory is highlighted both as the storehouse of these subaltern groups' history (different from that of the mainstream in markers and emphasis, even as there are overlaps) and for the manner of its dissemination, thus making for a resistant history-making as well as telling. This function of memory is one of the central ways in which it functions as a

strategy of resistance. Rosendo's and Dhani Munda's memory provide material for a resistant history. Rosendo (and Rumi) hold close to their heart the teachings of the old Chauqui, who may be dead "pero sus dichos vivían en el tiempo" (350; ch. I); this is similar to the case of Chotti remembering Dhani.

These novels attempt a subaltern view of mainstream history through references to India's non-violent struggle for liberation (*Chotti Munda*), and the *azules-colorados* civil war in Peru (*El mundo*). In Rosendo's case, events like the War of the Pacific and the civil war from mainstream Peruvian history are viewed critically, by imagining a perspective of the indigenous masses that suffered their effects and aftermath. At the same time, the memory of other *indios* depicted in the novel also recovers other buried or silenced histories and heroes of past indigenous revolts, such as that of Atusparia in 1885. Meanwhile, Dhani upholds the memory of *adivasi* revolts of the colonial era; by teaching Chotti the tale of Birsa's uprising, he also passes on the consciousness of the pivotal role of local agents of oppression (significant in the novel's publication in a postcolonial context) besides the white colonial masters.

By shifting the focus from mainstream historical milestones to these forgotten or lesser-talked about histories of the past, both novels resurrect subaltern pasts. They also force a rethink of "unsuccessful" struggles as minor markers awaiting fulfilment in the success of some "final" event. The preservation of history in forms such as story and song—contained in and disseminated via living human memory—provides a sharp contrast to those of written records. These oral histories gain both primacy as well as legitimacy in these texts; even their perceived lack of linear structure functions as a crucial marker of subaltern identity and difference.

2.2 Orality as Instrument of Hope

In a field guide to oral history in Latin America, David Carey Jr. argues for the urgency of decolonizing approaches in research and analysis, stating that "the integrity and legitimacy of the field of oral history has never been more important" (194). Although Carey's book is concerned with examining methodological, ethical and interpretive issues related to oral history research in Latin America, some of his observations are relevant for our purposes. In the context of survivors of the region's post-conflict societies of the final decades of the twentieth century, for example, he notes that oral history helps showcase how "illiterate people[...] are not without history," enabling scholars to "move beyond treating marginalized people as hapless and passive or elites as omnipotent and self-serving." Oral history, for years "relegated to the margins of the historical profession" (193), seems to be emerging from the shadows.

In an interview with Gabrielle Collu, Mahasweta Devi also highlights the role of *adivasis* as active makers of history—despite the lack of, or delay in, such acknowledgement—rather than as bystanders. She notes how upon the publication of her book on Birsa Munda,[26] "they [the tribals] said that for the first time they got their place in history. Indian history did not recognize the tribal fights, tribal rebellions. Never recognized them. Never wrote about them. Never mentioned them" (227). However, not only do these novels rescue the forgotten or neglected subaltern histories of resistance, they also focus attention on the way this history is practised—its orality, its forms—and how such practice itself stands for hope. We cannot ignore the fact that the recuperation of this orality here is inevitably made manifest through writing, to reach us, a literate audience; yet this awareness need not become another kind of impediment. It should not stop us recognizing that "literacy [...] is also infinitely adaptable. It can restore their memory,

[26] This is a reference to A*ranyer Adhikar*, or *The Right to the Forest*, her first novel on tribal issues; it focused on Birsa Munda and his rebellion against the British colonial regime at the end of the nineteenth century.

too" (Ong 14). If this is part of the task the two novels under consideration are undertaking, they are also signaling the need for a writing that relates more sensitively to oral worlds.

Adivasi responses to Devi's work, highlighted by the author herself, underline how orality and writing are neither mutually exclusive nor independent of each other. While different in their modes of thought and expression, orality and writing do not exist as parallel or autonomous domains. If scholarship across disciplines is increasingly recognizing oral sources as a repository of knowledge, information and perspectives difficult to find in archival documents (Carey Jr. 196), what have primarily been transmitted as oral histories also seek validation in, or draw from, written records. Writing can help synthesize, structure, and place in dialogue what may have otherwise been impossible to accomplish (as in this thesis). This is one of the ways in which orality and writing inform each other and work in tandem, instead of against each other. For example, Manuel Larrú, citing both the inclusion of oral "texts" into Alegría's novel, as well as the abundance of written stories that find their way into the Andean oral tradition,argues against creating an opposition between writing and orality; instead, he underlines the heterogenous and transcultural dimension of each of these modes of communication (60-61).

2.2.1 Oral History as Process in El mundo

Orality is an important ingredient for hope in Alegría's novel. We have mentioned the recurring story of the 1885 indigenous revolt, led by Pedro Pablo Atusparia. Here, we dwell on it more closely, to highlight the novel's use of orality to convey hope.

Benito's long absence from Rumi brings him in touch with life outside the community. From other *indios* on the *haciendas* where he finds work, he becomes aware of the historical Atusparia-led uprising, in a style that is decidedly spoken in its repetitiveness:

> He allí que corre el año 1885. He allí que los indios gimen bajo el yugo. Han de pagar un impuesto personal de dos soles semestrales, han de realizar gratuitamente los "trabajos de la república" construyendo caminos, cuarteles, cementerios [...] He allí que los gamonales arrasan las comunidades o ayllus. Han de trabajar gratis los indios para que siquiera los dejen vivir. Han de sufrir callados. No, amitos, alguna vez. (533; ch. VI)

Progressively, the history acquires a visual quality, and the narration changes from the past into the present tense. From the point when the population declares revolt, the events are narrated as if taking place right now, in front of one's very eyes. Listing the noted heroes of this revolution:

> Ahí está Pedro Cochachin, minero a quien decían Uchcu Pedro, pues uchcu quiere decir socavón o mina, terrible chancador de huesos en pugna siempre con el piadoso Atusparia. Ahí está José Orobio, el Cóndor Blanco, llamado así porque tenía blanca, aunque lampiña, la piel. Ahí está Ángel Bailón, cuñado de Atusparia, al mando de las estancias que generaron el movimiento. Y Pedro Nolasco León, descendiente de los caciques de Sipsa. Y tantos. (534; ch. VI)

As mentioned in the previous section, the first reference to Atusparia in the text occurs in the form of Rosendo's vague recollection of having heard something of the matter. Amid the labouring *indios* of the estates, however, the heroic story of this indigenous leader from a not-so-distant past acquires sharpness and detail. As Salazar Mejía reminds us: "la memoria colectiva reconstruye el pasado después de un proceso de selección y reinterpretación, y lo proyecta hacia el presente" (68). The *indios*, tired after long days of work, yet find the strength to speak share stories of the revolution when they can. Huddled in small groups, they speak in low voices:

> Así hablaban los indios, fatigados por la dura labor del día y de los días, en las noches del galpón. *Ellos recordaban más las victorias que las derrotas*. Y la noche se llenaba de

> emociones alegres y trágicas, de héroes casi legendarios, de luchadores astutos y tremendos. Estaban invictos y cualquier día la revolución iba a recomenzar. (535; ch. VI; emphasis mine)

Similar to the workings of memory, once more we see that not just the stories themselves but the way they are remembered and expressed is significant. The *indios' selective* remembrance is a case in point: privileging victories over defeat, it is the selectivity of their narration that keeps hope alive amid despairing conditions. What is also interesting is that this becomes Benito's language school too, as this is where he learns Quechua, "ese idioma, que suena a veces como el viento bravo y otras como el agua que corre bajo la tierra, y les entendía la parla triste" (533). By learning this language, Benito expands his notion of another history he had so far been distant from; listening to his companions will play a role in his being able to "read" the past later in the book. This is partly a reflection on the novel's readers too, who may be expected to learn to listen to the language of "orality" through their reading.

Carey Jr. observes that "understanding the recent past is contingent upon oral sources," especially in postcolonial societies where a large number of people are illiterate and where storytelling remains an important means of transmitting knowledge. "As communities come to agreement about what stories best convey the past and guide them in the present, narratives are adapted to contemporary circumstances. [...] oral history is a process rather than a product" (193). Here, he highlights an important aspect of oral history: its suppleness or ability to adapt. The treatment of the Atusparia episode underlines just such a *process* of history-making: Rosendo's vague notion of this historical uprising progresses to the *indios'* animated recreation of its battle scenes. In the final pages of the book, reflecting on the deaths of *comuneros* in the armed resistance to the onslaught of Amenabar's forces, Benito names Atusparia and Uchcu

once again, this time locating them as well as Rumi as part of an extended struggle: "Diga Atusparia o diga Porfirio, diga Uchcu o diga Fidel, Benito arrodilla su voz frente a un gran himno y se enciende las sienes con su recuerdo y se hunde en su gran noche iluminada. Porque ellos han muerto de la muerte de cuatro siglos" (942; ch. XXIV).

It could be helpful to note here the participatory structure of Quechua storytelling (between speaker and listener); citing Mannheim, Larrú outlines the lack of final authority in such narration: "no existe narrador autorizado final, como ocurre en la escritura, ni tampoco hay intérprete autorizado final" (56). While his focus may be on oral storytelling (not history), this participatory quality is visible in the Atusparia history-telling in *El mundo*. Benito falls back on the same story but brings greater topicality to his discourse by placing this, and Rumi's story, within the context of the centuries-old struggles of the indigenous in Peru. The text legitimizes both in different ways. The 1885 peasant revolt provides a historical background within which the resistance by Rumi becomes both a possibility and a necessity. Linking the fictitious Rumi to Atusparia and Uchcu helps view this history as a continuing element of the present. History is thus put to use for subversive purposes in the present, through remembrance.

Meanwhile, in contrast with Amenábar's insistence on the need for "hombres de empresa" (542; ch. VII) in the nation's march towards progress, there is the admiration and demand for gifted narrators such as Amadeo Illas, who narrates entertaining and witty stories such as "El juez y los dos rivales" and "El zorro y el conejo." Such stories are told (and heard) for the *pleasure* they bring, but they also function as carriers of wisdom from one generation to the next. The role of the listener is no less important here. The success of a story lies not just in how well it is narrated but also how well it is heard, making the listener an active part of the process. Each storyteller has been a listener: Amadeo had learnt the story from his mother, who

in turn had heard it from someone else. Meanwhile, the folklorist who hears Amadeo's fox and rabbit story eagerly jots it down for its richness of material. Benito too becomes an enthusiastic narrator of the Atusparia revolt to his friends in Lima, and later Rumi. Each listener, then, is a potential storyteller and/or transmitter of history. This orality, whose key elements are listening, remembering, and transmitting, then provides the basis for the continuity of subaltern history and knowledge, bringing us back to Rosendo's concern for sharing the stories of community life.

Besides serving these functions *within* the community, the incorporation of these oral narrators and their tales has other, more far-reaching effects, for the novel's readers. They signal a living and spoken Andean folklore, the very presence of which highlights their belonging to a different cultural system, telling "una historia otra, con una voz otra, distinta a la hegemónica que utilizaba el narrador grafocéntrico y autorizado," as Manuel Larrú notes in his discussion of the role of such tales in Alegría's novels (60).

As pointed out earlier, there are no neat categorizations between the oral and the written. Within the book, they overlap and inform each other. This is one of the functions of the incorporation of (modified) newspaper fragments in the latter part of the book, besides that of providing an overview of oppression of the indigenous in the Peru of the period. It is by hearing his syndicalist friend Lorenzo *read out* indigenous grievances from the newspaper that Benito learns to further universalize the experiences of his *comunidad* and see their struggles in a larger context. This is the turning point in Benito's "education," as he begins to connect his hitherto-local experiences of injustice to events at large. The chapter on Demetrio's brush with the three urban intellectuals has the folklorist make notes on the rich material he hears in Amadeo's story. In each case, their worldview is impacted, challenged, and changed.

2.2.2 Spoken Word as Weapon in Chotti Munda

Although only the second chapter of the book is inhabited by a living Dhani Munda, it is his memories (as well as the memory of him) that power the narrative until the end. That is the power of the spoken word that he leaves as his legacy with Chotti. In many ways, Dhani's memory is representative of the downtime of revolts, by which I mean the periods immediately following outbreaks of discontent (which, as in this case, can last years, even decades). Such periods of uncomfortable silence, of grievances unaddressed and wounded hopes, are not easily found in institutionalized, written history-making. Dhani's still-fiery speech contains the embers of a revolution; over time, it will rouse Chotti and, under his lead, the whole community. This is how Devi's novel charts the path to a collective memory, wherein a spark becomes a fire.

Oral storytelling, in *Chotti Munda*, helps locate the *adivasis*' place not just historically but also culturally. As Dhani begins to train Chotti in the forest, he not only teaches him archery but also seizes the chance to underline the cultural significance of these weapons. He points out how *adivasi* elements have been used and silenced by canonical *Hindu* epics such as the *Mahabharata*: "Where did t' Hindu gods learn to shoot those arrers? [...] From us folks" (15; ch. 2). These stories, meant to inculcate tribal pride, become another weapon in Chotti's arsenal, as tools to encourage the cultural survival and continuity of the community.

Later, others will be drawn to Chotti and stories will grow up all around him. A recurring sentence in Devi's novel notes how "everything is for storytelling in Chotti Munda's life" (6; ch. 2). Starting with winning archery contests at local fairs, Chotti steadily becomes a hero and de facto leader of his community. He guides and represents the Mundas at key moments in their struggles against exploitative elements. His community begins to proclaim his glory through songs. Not only do his actions provide material for stories, they reignite the practice of telling

such stories in the first place. By turning Chotti's "magical" feats into song, the Mundas are able to assert their triumph over the powers responsible for their subjugation:

> ye raise t'bow, ye hit t'target
>
> Makes daroga [police in charge] mighty afraid, mate –
>
> Ye go to Gormen and tell 'em our plea
>
> Makes Daroga mighty afraid, mate-
>
> Ye taught Dukhia Munda ta shoot
>
> Dukhia t'bonded slave, mate –
>
> Dukhia cuts t'manager's head off
>
> Makes Daroga scared, mate-. (76-77; ch. 6)

As Chotti notes, "they make songs cos they need to. [...] They look for hope when they make songs" (166; ch. XI). This is in line with the selective remembrance of the *indios* in *El mundo* working on the plantation as they recount stories of past rebellions. Munda songs in Devi's book are made to rally the community around what it sees as symbolic triumphs in circumstances heavily tilted against them, a reminder of the strategic mobilization of history by oral cultures.

The song-making also represents a leap from Dhani's lament early on in the book that "there's no one to listen" to his tale (10; ch. 2). Their new-found voice emanates from the group rather than individual agents with authority. They may sing of a Chotti, but the making and ownership of the songs is collective. No longer simply listeners and observers, the Mundas become active creators of their own history. The interweaving of these songs in Devi's book, besides giving voice to a community, also *interrupts* the writing with a spoken rhythm, a reminder of the novel's intrusion into the oral world of the Mundas.

Orality as a marker of difference is prominent in Devi's novel in another important way. Not only does the book mention that the Mundari language lacks script and that they record key events through story and song-making, it also transcribes the songs they sing. Surendra Jha notes of colonial discourse about India's tribals:

> [The] perception of tribal reality prior to colonial impingement is oriented to two distanced sources—Archival-historical records and folk memory. The former commands clear precedence in modern discourse as the more accurate representation of things as they were. Folk memory is regarded as a secondary source and it is recognized as valid remembrance only in so far as it confirms what is explicitly stated or at least discernible as implicit in historical records. (6)

By quoting each song the Mundas make up, often surrounding Chotti's feats and accomplishments, Devi's novel challenges the secondary status accorded to folk memory.

Readers also cannot help but note the particularly creative aspect of the process. Each song appears after the event it narrates has taken place, but adds an imaginative dimension. For instance, the news of Dhani's killing reaches the police precinct "in the proper way through police accounts" (22; ch. 2). Despite a prohibition on leaving his village, Dhani goes to Sailrakab,[27] where his followers annually gather on the anniversary of Birsa's death. Ecstatic at arriving there and reuniting with other comrades from the times of past revolutions, he rubs his face in the "home soil." The policeman in charge, who fears "another Munda uprising," shoots Dhani in the head. In contrast to this account, the Munda song is not about Dhani being killed, but becoming "eternal" (22). It switches the focus to his act of courage and defiance:

> Ye [Dhani] said, Hey I've come
>
> Ye climbed up on t' black cloud

[27] The site of Birsa's death.

Ye came to Jejur on t' black cloud [...]

Ye said home soil is me molasses, [...]

Eatin' that soil ridin' on t' black cloud

Ye went, whoa! To Dombari

Ye vanished into Sailrakab stone//

T'Daroga [police in charge] wept, slapped forehead and went off

[...]

On Sailrakab stone now flowers bloom

Ye are those flowers. (23)

This song highlights the heroic and glorious aspects of the event that otherwise lack such sharpness in the narrator's account. What it provides is an empowering recreation of the scene where, in death, Dhani Munda becomes perennial and fuels dormant *adivasi* pride once more. Significantly, this is the first song of the novel; in time, it travels far and reaches Dhani's own village too. It presents a triumph for him who had lamented there were no takers for his stories of times past. The incorporation of such songs is one of the novel's main achievements in terms of underscoring the writing/orality difference, but particularly in inviting us to dwell on the empowering role spoken or unwritten histories can play.

2.2.3 Section Conclusion

The novels in question highlight the orality of history, as well as its importance for the existence and continuity, of the indigenous/*adivasi* communities. In *El mundo*, it is the supple narration of the 1885 Atusparia revolt that provides the key to reading the empowering features of orality in history-telling. The recounting of this event is, as we have seen, constantly adapting itself to the

changing ambience. Orality provides the community the means to emphasize certain aspects and subdue others in the interests of the prevailing situation.

In *Chotti Munda*, the song-making by the Mundas takes centre stage in providing them a means to retain hope amid much despair. The songs are created and sung by the collective, and while they may sing of the feats of individual leaders (Dhani, Chotti, etc.), the creative authority lies in the group. On several occasions in the novel, Chotti is amused, and often even puzzled, by their song-making. He does not perceive himself to be as powerful as the songs project him to be, before realizing that the songs provide an anchor of hope for the Mundas, by highlighting symbolic triumphs in an otherwise dreary existence.

Also, by repeatedly pointing out that the Mundari language has no script, and transcribing the songs they sing to preserve incidents of importance to them, orality acquires status as an aid rather than a handicap. The novel demonstrates how orality follows a different set of norms, and also highlights its legitimacy in the context.The incorporation of Munda songs in *Chotti Munda*, and of oral folklore of the Andes in *El mundo*, indicates attempts at a formal assimilation of the orality of these groups within what is in reality an alien space for them: the novel.

2.3 Continuities and Breaks

We have looked at how these two novels show the sharing of knowledge (whether historical, cultural, social, or political) through the spoken word as the principal means by which the subaltern communities in question ensure their continuity. This continuity, even when it more or less successfully achieved—as in the passage of a sort of "arrow" from Birsa to Dhani, and then on to Chotti—is not represented as a smooth, unbroken chain. The orality of their memory necessarily involves gaps. Over time, these gaps provide for breaks in continuity, leading to

change. For instance, in *Chotti Munda* we see how these very gaps in Dhani's training of Chotti affect the kind of leadership the latter provides to his community.

This section will show in greater depth the interplay between continuity and change, the old and the new, mainly via the dynamic between the central pairings in each book: Rosendo/Benito in *El mundo*, and Dhani/Chotti in *Chotti Munda*. The idea is to look at what changes and what remains of the old in the negotiation between these figures. My larger point is that the way in which continuity and change interact in these novels is crucial to deciding the extent of their success in depicting subaltern agency and resistance. Surendra Jha writes:

> Responses to the contemporary tribal situation in India could be characterized in terms of two apparently polarized projects. Many of the more hard-headed modernizers among us harbour a terrible secret wish [...] to consolidate a homogenous social order [...]. There are others—no less destructive for all their well-intentioned concern for tribals—who would like, as it were, to reconstruct tribal entities as separate and neatly-segregated from the rest. (16)

These debates about tradition vs modernity, segregation vs assimilation, are not new. They have long been present in both Latin America and India with respect to indigenous peoples and *adivasis*. Such a tussle between the proponents of modernity on the one hand, and tradition on the other, often leaves little middle ground by framing the issue as a choice between two extremes. Yet these two novels highlight and problematize this debate, especially through the interaction between continuity and change dramatized through their central figures.

2.3.1 Affinities Beyond Blood in Chotti Munda

Although both are Mundas, Dhani and Chotti are not related by blood. Yet, as we have noted, Dhani trains this young boy not just in archery, but also to serve as a link in the historical

memory of the tribe's resistance tocolonial masters as well as the *dikus*. He thus initiates Chotti into a tradition of *adivasi* pride at a time when others in the clan seem to be buckling under the weight of exploitation and despair. Later, Chotti will continue this practice, by schooling not just one but dozens of young Mundas to aim arrows with pride. He comes to occupy the place of mentor to young Munda boys, smitten with his archery "magic," and eager to learn, just as he had been when, years previously, he had asked Dhani to teach him. Chotti does not turn away anyone, and starting with three, he coaches an entire generation of Munda men into the skill. "Thus the training continued. Day after day...There is an especial joy in teaching them. A new excitement. If they win at the local and regional fairs, his legacy will remain with them" (79).

The book comes full circle at the end. Chotti, who began the journey as Dhani's disciple, has now prepared many more to take his place. Chotti had often wondered why Dhani chose to leave while knowing well he wouldn't be spared by the authorities. Time after time he sees reminders of what Dhani did, among other Munda figures who choose to do things "to stay true, meself to meself" (326; ch. 16). By claiming responsibility for some killings in order to pre-empt police terror on the village, this also becomes his own course of action at the end.

There is also a "fictive continuity" established between the protagonist Chotti and the historical figure of Munda leader Birsa, to which Spivak refers (Devi,"Telling History" x). Birsa died at the young age of twenty-five at the turn of the nineteenth century, and it is significant that Chotti is born around the same time ("All this happened in 1915. When Chotti was fifteen" [9; ch. 2]). In some senses, Chotti becomes a cross between Dhani and Birsa—his character as a leader has more in common with the latter, while he lives to a ripe old age like his mentor. At the culmination of the novel, Chotti is nearly the same age as Dhani was when they first met; this is

also the moment that best dramatizes the status Chotti has come to acquire through his years at the forefront as a de facto leader of the oppressed in his village.

Both Dhani and Chotti exhibit a deep consciousness of the realities of their present, setting them apart within their community. Chotti's point of reference remains the memory of his time with Dhani, his guide, even as he intuits gaps in his knowledge: "How many things does Chotti not know, didn't get to know because Dhani is no longer there. He didn't get to hear of the time when the Mundas were free, when *Diku* and *Gormen* and contractor and recruiter and missionary hadn't entered their lives" (39; ch. 3). Yet time shows that it is these very gaps that make him the kind of leader that Dhani could not have been, or that even Birsa Munda was not.

While the warrior of armed struggle remains at the periphery of his community as the twentieth century takes over, tragically out of place in a scenario where the Mundas seem to have been tamed, Chotti transcends Dhani and fills a leadership vacuum, while remaining true to his mentor's legacy. Having never known a time free of dikus, authorities and other agents of oppression, he is more grounded in what *is*, unlike his mentor who cannot help but be nostalgic for the past, refusing to accept the passing of a "golden age" of Munda resistance:

> In yer time there is no Lord, no Ulgulan, no fire in anyone's soul to change t' Munda's life, no piercin' of moneylender, polis, an' soldier with' arrers in t' heat of that fire, but there's t' Chotti fair. Gormen babysits t' Munda tribe that way. (13; ch. 2)

Chotti is able to turn Dhani's principle that "blood kin is not everything" (11; ch. 2) into a strength to guide his decisions, making a leap outside the Munda community. He puts it to use best by establishing a unity with a non-*adivasi,* but equally oppressed group of outcaste Hindus, who make up the lowest rung of Hindu caste society and are also referred to by the derogatory epithet of "untouchables." The memory of past rebellions and Dhani's participation in the

struggles of other subaltern groups, when combined with Chotti's rootedness in the complex realities of his time, enable his fresh approach in a changing context. In contrast to Dhani's solitary fight, Chotti manages to translate the unity of the marginalized into reality by forging links with these non-*adivasi* communities, and act as a unifying thread for the Mundas and the Hindu outcastes. Thus, the push for greater rights in the novel takes into accountother "oppressed of the land" (126; ch. 9), rather than just one specific group.

In the short period of time he spends with Chotti, Dhani manages to pass on the crux of his message. But there are many things they did not have time for; some of these are like riddles that Chotti grapples with throughout the text, such as Dhani's defiance of the prohibition on his movement, and Dukhia Munda's beheading of an exploitative manager. These acts puzzle Chotti. He cannot help wondering why they did what they did, knowing fully well it would end badly for them. After all, Dhani was shot dead, and Dukhia was hanged. Thus, even as Chotti learns to lead his people through several changes—forming alliances with the Hindu outcastes, the influx of modernity and changing economic landscape, growing political criminality, the appearance of leftist revolutionaries—he never stops looking back, either. He continues to interpret the past, what it meant to be Dhani, and what it means to be true to oneself amid changing times.

Initially drawing attention for his individual skill, Chotti slowly passes into unofficial spokesmanship and/or leadership of the Mundas. In general, he occupies the quieter space of a mediator for his clan, whether it be with the moneylender/landlord, the contractor or the authorities. Yet at the very end, his actions and demeanour are a throwback and a tribute to the memory of the rebellious Dhani and what he symbolized.

2.3.2 An Imagined Mentorship in El mundo

Benito Castro is Rosendo Maqui's adopted son. Benito is a shadowy figure through most of the text; he emerges in Rosendo's mind now and then, and sometimes the narrative follows the journey of this itinerant character so that he is never completely absent from the story. In contrast to Chotti, Benito is denied the stability of a father figure: he is (forcibly) fathered by a passing soldier during a civil war. Then not only does his first stepfather hate him, but Benito kills him in an act of self-defence. It is only with Rosendo that he comes to share a relationship based on mutual affection and respect, but their association does not last long enough to develop into a mentorship. It is almost as if at the age when Chotti comes under Dhani's tutelage, Benito is prised from Rosendo's care.

Rosendo has the status of mentor only in Benito's mind, and much of his "education" comes in fact from his experience during a sixteen-year absence from the community. It is the learning acquired through working as a *peon* on *haciendas*, through witnessing fiery speeches about the exploitation of indigenous communities, through friendship with syndicalists in Lima, and in his years spent in the army, that nourish his belief in community life as better than all other options, by providing him opportunities for comparison. Rosendo Maqui does not get the opportunity to mentor Benito as in the case of Dhani and Chotti. And though the young man symbolically succeeds Rosendo upon his return—becoming first *regidor*, and later *alcalde* of the community—the absence of spatial simultaneity between them is too glaring to miss. This is one of the main reasons the text seems to convey an either/or perspective: Benito returns only after Rosendo's death, andit is almost as though Rosendo and Benito *cannot* coincide. That the old has to vanish for the new to appear, that myth has to bow out to make way for modern progress.

Benito represents a sharp break with the old ways. He does not forget old projects—"Rosendo Maqui deseó escuela porque comprendió que era preciso saber, que era necesario el progreso" (927; ch. XXIII)—but prioritizes others as more immediately necessary. His insistence on dismissing "superstition" and pressing ahead with draining the lake believed enchanted by the *comuneros*, in order to make way for cultivation, etc., are part of this change. In contrast to the wise and cautious patriarch Maqui, Benito goes into revolutionary overdrive on re-entering the community, paving way for the new in many ways. He continues in the spirit of Maqui—his actions are intended for the benefit of the community—but the approach he takes is drastically different. Where the earthy Rosendo built consensus, and inspired a sense of continuity and stability, Benito is urbane, enterprising, and quick to action. As the plot develops, there is a distancing from the model upheld by Maqui. Benito Castro will always cite Maqui as his guide, but in practice he becomes an agent of significant change for Rumi.

Not only will he be a *mestizo* mayor of the community, his leadership will take a different and more forceful direction. Time and speed become key, and superstition something to be overcome rather than dwelt upon, in contrast to Rosendo's musings in the book's opening chapter. Just as Chotti builds bridges between his Munda clan and other oppressed groups, Castro, too, will prove to be key in linking Rumi with the rest of the indigenous world, however fleetingly. Escajadillo considers him to be this very figure and points out how "a diferencia de los pasados tiempos de Rosendo Maqui, Benito implica el final del 'aislamiento' de Rumi; él hace que el sentido y el destino de la comunidad se conecten con los del pueblo indio" ("Filiación y derrotero del último alcalde de Rumi" 158).

There are two ways to explain the annihilation of the community at the end of the novel: one, as the outcome foretold by the ominous appearance of the snake when the novel began; two,

as the result of the unstoppable movement of historical time toward modernity for which communities like Rumi are, in view of those like Amenábar, an anachronism. What these scenarios share is the sense of the inevitability of Rumi's destruction. Therefore, both the mythical and the historical understanding of the situation seem to predict the same fate for the community. Here, it is important to remember the overarching reality of the book as a fictional construction. Predestination is also intrinsic to the form of the novel itself, in the sense that the book is a world created by the author who decides what will come to pass and how. Beginning the book with an ominous event is an authorial choice by Alegría, as is the decision to end it on a note of tragic destruction. This becomes all the more telling in the light of Cornejo Polar's observation in *Writing in the Air* that "the elegy that [the book] becomes in the end was premature: in major areas of the highlands, communities survived the ferocious assault of gamonalism in the first half of the twentieth century, some by preserving their age-old customs and others by modernization" (145). Even as it dramatizes an "irreconcilable" conflict between the mythical and the historical understanding of events, its own "predetermined" structure suggests *El mundo* to be a curious mix of each current.

The text transmits such predetermination in the form of cryptic narratorial remarks at certain points in the story, mainly in relation to Rosendo and Benito. This is done either to postpone an explanation of past events, such as how and why Benito left Rumi: "Por el momento, no consideramos oportuno puntualizar nada, sobre todo respecto al traspiés de Maqui" (369; ch. I). Other such remarks withhold knowledge of the future from the reader even as they reveal that the narrator is already privy to such information: "Tampoco deseamos adelantar cosa alguna acerca del posible retorno de Benito Castro. Sería prematuro" (369). These comments interwoven into the narrative indicate that not only does the narrator know about what has gone

before and what is to come later, he also makes it clear he is postponing filling in these gaps until he sees fit. Even if these instances were only meant to stoke readers' curiosity and maintain suspense, at the same time they reveal the fictionality and the already-decided nature of the text. This narrative intervention weakens any sense of the characters as figures who might have agency, as it reveals (perhaps unconsciously) how much they are always subject to plot.

It is then worth noting the novel's attention to, and emphasis on, dramatic action rather than the characters' negotiations with change. The entire action in *El mundo* develops within a span of two decades. In this time, Rumi goes from being a site of Edenic characteristics to the first uprooting, the desolation of Yanañahui, and finally, its complete annihilation. The author gives the community plenty of problems to confront, but almost no time to respond to them. Indeed, if we were to bracket off the emigrant chapters for a time, we would find that there is little breathing space for Rumi, as it goes through a series of sharply-defined breaks.

2.3.3 Section Conclusion

Our examination of continuity and breaks in the two novels reveals a number of overlaps but also significant differences between the texts. For example, the central continuity in both books is established through spiritual kinship and affinity rather than ties of blood. Yet the bond, and thus the continuity, between Dhani and Chotti is stronger and more easily seen, compared to that connecting the other pair. Their lack of spatial coincidence throughout *El mundo*, except in their respective memories of past times, means that Rosendo and Benito offer little hope for (or evidence of) continuity from one to the other. This underlines Benito's differences from Rosendo, weakening the notion of a negotiation between continuity and change, and leading to a sensation divided between absolute continuity or radical change in the text as a whole.

In Devi's book, on the other hand, change and continuity work more in tandem. An either/or perspective towards continuity and change is viewed as myopic through the example of Chotti's ancestor Purti (mentioned in chapter one of this thesis), who voluntarily left his dwelling place upon discovering gold dust, because he was afraid of resource-hungry outsiders coming in to spoil his Munda world. Benito is very different from Rosendo in his personal characteristics as well as his style of leadership. His aggressive streak, zeal for change, and result-oriented approach are a far cry from the pacific, quieter, and consensus-building Rosendo. The movement in Devi's novel is inverse: Chotti is a much-mellowed version of Dhani. Chotti is an agent of change, but in a far less dramatic way than Benito. His leadership of the community comes about gradually; unlike his mentor Dhani, he falls into the role reluctantly, yet his patience and keen alertness to changing realities allows him to rally the Mundas into a unity and a consciousness of their situation not just internally but in conjunction with a non-tribal group, the oppressed low-caste Hindus.

Another point that distinguishes *El mundo* and *Chotti Munda* is the focus on dramatic action. The rapidly unfolding events in *El Mundo* mean that Rumi has little to no time to strategize or develop well-thought-out responses to them. Similarly, as a reader, we may find ourselves asking what lies in store next for the *comuneros*. In the case of *Chotti Munda*, this question is transformed: how will Chotti and his people respond to whatever happens next? In the latter book, it is the developing consciousness of the characters that gains precedence over the events that unfold. Besides the fact that its plot is spread over a much longer period of time (eight decades, although it also looks back further into the past), what aids the emphasis on process rather than action in Devi's novel is that it manifests a "continuity placed within an open frame at both ends," in the writer's own words ("Telling History" xi). In this context, we can

consider the circularity of both narratives. Each presents a circular structure: from omen to consummation in *El Mundo*; and from a failed uprising (Birsa's *Ulgulan*) to the possibility of a new one in *Chotti Munda*. However, it is the sensation of a closed predestination in the former and the open-endedness in the second that produce different effects in terms of subaltern agency.

2.4 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has addressed themes of memory, orality, and continuity, and the relationship between these elements in each novel. We saw that both Alegría and Devi underline the importance that subaltern communities assign to historical and cultural remembrance in order to maintain their continuity. The texts, to a greater or lesser degree, also work towards redressing amnesia surrounding their history in the mainstream. Even more importantly, they show interest in the modes of dissemination of this historical memory.

The orality of both communities (as opposed to a written culture) endows their remembrance and history-telling with particular features, and we saw how such orality is often portrayed as a strength, rather than a setback. Finally, we studied the protagonist pairs of Rosendo/Benito and Dhani/Chotti to see how continuities seldom have absolutely smooth transitions. While retaining some features, they also acquire new ones along the way. By looking at the novels' depiction of the interplay between continuity and change, we tried to gauge the extent to which they dodge or endorse a binary understanding of these subaltern groups.

To sum up, here are the main ways subaltern resistance is underlined in this context in these novels. First, what is highlighted is a will to continuity (as against forgetting) in these groups, evident in their active engagement with *their* (not mainstream) history, as also their preoccupation with transmitting it onward to the young. This is visible both in Rosendo's ruminations, as well as Dhani's "haste" in training Chotti. Their history, preserved in living

human memory and passed on through speech, may be prone to gaps, and seem unstructured or even disorderly. However, each of these features is shown to either foster hope in the present (such as through selective remembrance), or provide the impetus for a fresh approach amid changing circumstances, such as through Chotti's novel leadership.

Second, their orality highlights the participatory, rather than authoritative, process of history-making and sharing. In *El mundo*, the Atusparia story offers a very interesting case: it is told differently, by different speakers, in three different instances, varying in intensity and effect. In *Chotti Munda*, the songs in praise of Dhani and Chotti are composed and sung collectively by the clan. Thus, both the Andean indigenous and the Mundas are shown as active makers of history, which itself is shown to be process rather than product. Devi's choice to transcribe songs into her book especially stands out, perhaps due to their form that is so distinct from conventional narrative (such as folktales in *El mundo*). This intrusion of the oral form of the song into the framework of what is inherently the written form of the novel is conspicuous, and thus more likely to draw readers' attention to the complexities of the writing/orality interaction inside the book, and by extension, that of the speaking world and the world being spoken of. The orality of the songs talks back to the novel's written nature on its home turf.

Third, the relationship and correspondence between Rosendo/Benito and Dhani/Chotti could offer an insight into the dynamic between continuity and change in these novels. *Chotti Munda* presents a stronger bond of mentorship between its two principal figures. Although Chotti spends only a short time under Dhani's tutelage, it is a redefining experience. While making his way through change, Chotti also never stops looking back, his figure symbolizing a meeting ground for the old and the new. In contrast, the lack of spatial coincidence between Rosendo and Benito (except in their respective memories), and the sharp breaks rather than links

in their respective approaches as leaders weakens the potential for reconciliation between the old and the new, or tradition and modernity.

Chapter 3: Directions and Possibilities for the Future

In this chapter, I examine what the subaltern communities in *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* and *Chotti Munda and his Arrow* see as possibilities for a better future. In what long-term projects do these communities seek hope for a more effective resistance against oppression, and to what extent are these projects successful,viable, and/or problematized within the texts? In this context, we shall discuss the following two themes: schooling and/or education; and solidarities, while also exploring if and how these novels undercut, problematize, and resist an imagination of their futures from the outside.

Until now, we have mainly focused on the present of the communities as well as their historical views of themselves,as depicted in these novels. That is, we have dwelt mainly on their practices of resistance with respect to the past or the present. This chapter shifts to an examination of the kind of future these communities envision for themselves. This is significant considering ongoing tussles over the meanings of "progress" and "development" between dominant and subaltern discourses. Speaking of India, for example, it has been pointed out how "despite the state's commitment to help the *adivasis* grow 'according to their own genius and tradition,' development has devalued and undermined much of what was positive in their culture, knowledge system, skills, institutions of governance, practices of resource management and use, language, and other cultural traditions" (Munshi 3). Doubtless, one of the main tasks these books undertake is to re-evaluate these aspects, including the customary subaltern systems which differentiate them from mainstream ones.

For instance, in *El mundo*, the *comunidad* of Rumi produces enough food to sustain itself while selling or exchanging the surplus for the goods it needs. It enjoys barter-based trade relations with the dry, and agriculturally-poor, neighbouring village of Muncha. The latter

supplies *cañazo* to Rumi in exchange for wheat and corn (392; ch. II). Indeed, the community's explicitly-mentioned monetary dealings often revolve around "oppressive" entities: fees for the lawyer, wages for the schoolteacher, even (unfair) fines to Amenábar.[28] While revealing the dangers of simplistic "development" solutions that feed the loss of their distinct systems, practices, and ways of life, this chapter aims to shed light on empowering possibilities for these groups towards the future, as seem to be suggested in these texts. It also shows more clearly the relevance and benefits of reading these books today, especially in a comparative framework.

Section one discusses the theme of schooling and/or education, a concern common to both novels. What is the meaning, and what are the characteristics of education that the communities in each novel imagine? Do they envisage a formal schooling that might improve their chances of integration into mainstream society, or alternatives to it? What are the aspirations they seek to fulfill through this enterprise? We shall note the view(s) of education as a possible means of alleviating the oppression they face, and at more than one level, i.e. the different sections this education targets, including importantly, the readers of the novels themselves. Here, my central argument is that *Chotti Munda* endorses an autochthonous, rooted education, while that suggested in *El mundo*is more flexible or mobile. However, what both have in common is the push toward reader education.

Section two deals with solidarity, an idea that is highlighted in these books. It is seen in the form of providing collective labour for the welfare of the community and its members—whether *El mundo*'s school project (all members contribute their skills, ranging from baking

[28] Biswamoy Pati also refers to the theme of barter/monetisation, noting how some tribal communities in India, especially those with a primarily hunter-gatherer lifestyle, sold forest produce in the local market and bought essential commodities like rice, salt, oil, etc. "Given the absence of land and money in their hands they normally depended on a system of exchange (barter) that pushed them closer to the exploitative traders. This particular problem assumed alarming proportions in a context that was marked by increasing monetisation. Thus, tribals worked in exchange of money to meet their needs, leading to the rise of the bonded labour system" (12).

bricks, to making *esteras*) or the free labour that the Hindu outcastes voluntarily give on Chhoti's land to rid it of stones, in *Chotti Munda*. But, above all, solidarities are present in the links between the struggles of the highlighted groups—indigenous, *adivasi*—and those of others with similar problems, even as the extent to which these are fruitfully realized may vary.

Education and solidarity are connected. In part this is because the success of the former is gauged by the extent to which it generates empowering solidarities for the communities in question. We will see how it is education (in its different forms) that makes possible the emergence of wide-ranging solidarities in favour of these groups in the real world, including support from intellectuals, activists, and the general public. The role of such education, that targets the public, in garnering support for grassroots movements must not be underestimated. Speaking of Mexico's Zapatistas,[29] Noam Chomsky notes:

> Right after [they] came into the public eye, they were able to gain a good deal of public exposure both in Mexico and even beyond in very imaginative ways, and that protected them. That made it hard for the Mexican government, surely with U.S. support, to just move in and violently destroy them. Since then, there's been an attempt to remove them from the public eye so that such measures can be undertaken [...] It's very important to maintain, and indeed, extend public concern and commitment because that's the main protection that any popular movement has against destruction. (100-101)

[29] The Zapatistas are members of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), a guerrilla group founded in the late twentieth century in Mexico. It spearheaded a leftist movement, mainly comprising the indigenous peoples in the state of Chiapas, the country's southernmost state. On Jan. 1, 1994, they came to global attention when they staged an audacious rebellion to protest economic policies they believed would adversely impact the country's indigenous populations, and demanding justice and democracy. They were "one of the first popular movements to recognize neoliberalism as a dangerous new stage of global capitalism and called NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] a death sentence for the Indigenous peasants of Mexico" (Klein).

Chomsky's comment underlines how visibility (and the solidarities it brings about) is needed for an effective fightback, and these novels have been instrumental in bringing these groups into the spotlight, within their own countries and at large in the world.

3.1 Schooling and Education

Literacy, and access to the world of reading and writing, is a theme in each novel. What are the attitudes towards literacy and schooling in these novels? Do they represent an effective strategy of resistance for these communities? Why or why not, and to what extent? We shall also look at the different forms education takes in these novels. This will involve a discussion of this theme at two levels: its treatment within the story, and secondly, at the level of the writer and reader(s) of the books themselves. Education has been much discussed with reference both to the indigenous peoples in Latin America, as well as the *adivasis* in India. In Latin America, Kim Díaz notes that, like Peruvian essayist/poet Manuel González Prada (1844 - 1918), who had mixed feelings about education and ultimately did not believe that education would bring about freedom for American Indians, "Mariátegui likewise believed that education was not the solution: 'the question of the Indian, more than pedagogical, is economic, it is social'" (187).

One basic question arises here: what is education? The term has connotations of a broad and positive nature, but the standardization of schooling in the modern world has led it to become synonymous with schooling, especially formal school systems. Elizabeth A. Sumida Huaman notes that the term "implies a range of conceptualizations, including formal schooling tied to national political agendas" and that "formal education is perhaps the most important method of cultivating a cohesive national identity rooted in notions of citizenship, democracy, modernity, and progress." She also highlights that "while formal education in the global South is believed to provide increased social and economic opportunities for students, schooling can also

replicate social inequalities" (14). Here, we have the idea of education as a double-edged sword, where lack of access to formal schooling often entails a high degree of marginalization in these postcolonial countries thanks to a colonial legacy of education that has been difficult to shake off even decades later. Critics of India's attempts at decolonizing education have observed how the British colonial system had aimed at producing civic, loyal citizenry and bureaucracy to facilitate its rule, an idea best-expressed in Macaulay's oft-cited "Minute Upon Indian Education." Such a system "further legitimized the relationship between schooling and economic mobility as those who could speak and write the colonizers' language were accommodated in government jobs and thus were 'alienated' from their own culture and country-men" (Sharma and Mir 4). Likewise in Peru, educational policy is not conducive to the needs and aspirations of all groups; Sumida Huaman observes how it has been "narrowly constructed and narrated largely by non-Indigenous peoples motivated by mainstream notions of progress" and cites recent findings to show the way schooling can *contribute* to the marginalization of Indigenous children (12), and how Indigenous knowledge and related pedagogies can suffer delegitimization through labels such as "informal [...] or non-formal education" (15).

As with the questions we have examined in previous chapters—land and forest rights, historiography, labour, etc.—colonial-era power structures and systems of oppression and exclusion persist in the arena of education as well. A colonial pattern of thinking is pervasive in educational policies and approaches in both Peru and India, the effect of which is understandably heightened in the case of indigenous communities. With such odds stacked against them, we shall see how successfully Rumi and the Mundas negotiate their way around the aspiration for inclusion without compromising their own historical, political and cultural legacies.

The subtitle of Rivera Cusicanqui's book, *Ch'ixinakax Utxiwa: una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores,* is significant in that it reflects on both practices and discourses of decolonization, meaning she places at par the practices in speech as well as action—the theory as well as the praxis. Her passionate critique of North American academia, and its versions of postcolonial and subaltern studies, is especially useful for it signals one of the main threats of colonial discourse masquerading as decolonizing talk, marked as it is by "un sello culturalista y academicista, desprovisto del sentido de urgencia política" (57). Her warning to be on guard against the reproduction and consolidation of the same old structures of power and hierarchy serves as a guiding principle for us to identify the level of empowering resistance that these novels depict in their pursuit of education for these communities.

Various scholars have noted how "for Indigenous peoples, mainstream schooling and ideals of success have historically signified extermination and assimilation policies—extermination of Indigenous identities, languages, and cultural practices, and assimilation into Western and mainstream societies. There are numerous examples of the impact of this process worldwide on Indigenous cultures, languages, psyches, ecologies, and sovereignty" (Sumida Huaman 14). History shows how education for such communities, when imposed or imagined from the outside, has often spelt disaster, the best known example being that ofresidential boarding schools for native children in North America and Australia.[30] In this sense, the

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[30] Raygorodetsky speaks of the case of Canada: "For decades, under the banner of 'nation building,' the Canadian government made every effort to assimilate First Nations into mainstream Canadian society throughout the country, or as this policy became known later, 'kill the Indian in the child.' As if this phrase weren't gruesome enough, the means to achieving this goal were even more so- forcibly separating children as young as two years old from their families for up to fifteen years, forbidding the use of their language, and punishing them if they dared engage in any traditional practices. At its peak in the early 1930s, the residential school system operated eighty such facilities across Canada.

"Until the last school closed its doors in 1996, the lives of more than one hundred and fifty thousand First Nations children were irreversibly changed through systematic psychological, cultural , physical, and often sexual abuses. Only in 2008 did the Canadian government make an official apology to the victims of this cultural genocide, to their families, and to all First Nations, and set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in order to document

education that is of interest for us is the one that communities in *Chotti Munda* and *El mundo* imagine for themselves, and the ways in which their distinct identity and culture are shown to be integral to these communities' life as well as survival.

While access to education, and literacy (the skills of reading and writing), is desired by both communities, we need to examine if it is also preferred *over* their own culture. That is, what is the extent to which they aspire to an education tied (or not) to their culture. *Chotti Munda*, in particular, offers a range of instances that make evident the thrust towards a cultural resurgence, including repeated attempts to retrieve and highlight the relevance of the Mundas' traditional knowledge and systems (medicine, barter, and so on).

K.K. Chakravarty points out that indigenous and tribal communities across the world have provided lessons towards the reinvention of cognitive categories for conserving human habitats, mindscapes, natural resources, memories, identities and symbols. It is essential, he adds, "to act on these lessons to bridge the gulf yawning between natural and social sciences, inductive and deductive, local and global, textual and contextual, tangible and intangible knowledge, ideas and expressions" (8-9). The gap, he explains, has originated from "the particularistic, positivist, intellectual roots of the universal telos assumed for production and dissemination of knowledge by westernizing technifying elites," which has led to a radical simplification and homogenization of the complexity and variety of strategies in the management of natural and human resources (9). In both novels, we see how their systems (or their legacies) critique the bases of modern politics and economy, such as centralization and monetization, either directly or by showing alternative models.

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testimonies and inform all Canadians about what happened in the residential schools, in order to ensure that it would never happen again" (208).

Another issue is the educational role played by the novels themselves in their respective sociopolitical contexts. We saw in the last chapter how these texts are seen as documents of hope, in one way or another, by their authors, for both of whom the act of writing necessarily involves a social responsibility. The educational intent, directed at the readers, then, is one of the main purposes and contributions of *Chotti Munda* and *El mundo.*

3.1.1 Schooling Readers in El mundo

Rosendo has a dream project: a school for Rumi's children; in his mind, the community's "mejor obra" (402; ch. III). When the novel opens, the construction of a school is already underway. A space has been set out for the purpose, bricks are being made, Rosendo has been up and about trying to secure supplies and a teacher. Despite a string of obstacles—mainly official apathy and red tape—the determination and funds invested by the community indicate how close the project is to their heart. For Rosendo, to overcome the fear of "papel medio pintadito de eso que llaman letras" (402) that has afflicted their generations thus far, "*convenía* que los muchachos supieran leer y escribir y también [...] las importantes cuatro reglas" (353; ch. I; emphasis mine). The school is a project of hope to secure the future of the new generation. Overtly, the narrative places confidence in schooling as a means to raise oneself intellectually as well as morally. One glance at the villain Amenábar's lengthy monologues to his legal accomplices is sufficient to prove this: he rues the fate that *too much* education has brought to his brothers, and shows nothing but contempt for such "intelectualito(s)" (542; ch. VII).

In contrast, an important question is raised by Benito Castro's concept of school, which mainly involves notions of modern "progress," and replacing what *is* through uprooting what he believes are the community's unfounded beliefs: "De funcionar escuela en Yanañahui, en diez o veinte años nadie creería en lagunas encantadas y Chachos" (927; ch. XXIII). This reveals his

belief that the community is being held back from "progress" by its own outdated beliefs which, through education, would show themselves as such. Schooling, for Benito, is a tool to weed out superstition. In her examination of indigenism in Peru and Bolivia through the thought of three thinkers from the region (González Prada, Mariátegui, and Fausto Reinaga), Kim Díaz points out the "complicated and oftentimes problematic" aspects of *indigenismo*[31] in the Americas: "Indigenists have advocated that if given the proper training and education, that is, if American Indians were 'civilized,' they might be as intelligent as Europeans—again, employing European civilization as the standard. [...] The unquestioned standard of civilization and humanity is always either European or mestizo (i.e., a mix of European and Indigenous)" (180). In this light, Benito's attitude is more indigenist than indigenous. His idea about what school will do—it will dismantle superstition—and his explanation of how Amenábar was not affected by Nasha Suro's "witchcraft" aligns his thinking with the *gamonal* more than with Rosendo or the community: "estimaba que solamente con el progreso el indio podía desarrollarse y librarse de la esclavitud. '¿Por qué se salvó don Alvaro Amenábar de las brujerías de Nasha Suro? Solamente porque no le tuvo miedo. Eso era el progreso'" (927; ch. XXIII). In a striking twist, Benito thus becomes the mirror image of the *gamonal*, promoting the same set of values as the latter, with the only exception that he envisages the inclusion of the indigenous part of the population. And while he may attribute Rosendo's desire for a school to a desire for "progress," we can doubt such a reading. The former mayor of Rumi had more likely seen it as a means to access the outside and strengthen the community's self-sufficiency: "Aura ya habrá escuela... después se podrá mandar

[31] "Broadly speaking, Indigenism [or *indigenismo*] is the study of and advocacy for Native or Aboriginal peoples primarily by Westerners, the ideologies that support the development of Native/Aboriginal peoples, whether these ideologies are articulated by Westerners or Native/Aboriginal peoples. It also refers to a genre of literature, poetry, and social sciences that focuses on Native or Aboriginal peoples. Indigenism has a complicated and evolving history. For instance, Bartolome de Las Casas was an Indigenist given that he advocated that American Indians were indeed humans" (Díaz 180).

a los muchachos más güenos a estudiar... Que jueran médicos, ingenieros, abogaos, profesores... Harto necesitamos los indios quien nos atienda, nos enseñe y nos defienda... ¿Quién nos ataja? ¿Po' qué no lo podemos hacer?... Lo haremos..."(509; ch. V). Even as he imagines the young children in professions associated with modernity, he does not define these in terms of "progress" or a severing of cultural ties. He envisages it as a means of bringing benefits, and giving back, to the community.

What Rosendo senses is a lack. He wishes to redress the *indios*' state of being uninformed, perhaps to access that which the "technology of writing makes available" (Ong 1). This comes to pass especially after he overhears a conversation between figures of authority, and learns of political events concerning the indigenous population which they do not know about simply because they do not read: "Ahí había, pues, un pequeño ejemplo de lo que pasaba, y la indiada ignorante sin saber nada. [...] 'Formar en fila, comuneros, que ahora se trata de instruirse.' Plac, ploc, plac, ploc, y ya están hechos unos letrados" (354; ch. I). Yet the project of the school remains unfulfilled. With the first unfavourable verdict, displacement and its aftermath, the school is left behind, in all senses of the word. The unfinished state of the building is symbolic, with its "muros desnudos que clamaban por techo" (625; ch. VIII). Even references to the school become scant, and then entirely disappear from the text until after Benito's return. The non-fulfilment of Rumi's school project, then, negates it as an effective means of redressing the indigenous situation. In the absence of a conducive social and economic atmosphere, the novel does not pursue schooling as a feasible option for gaining admission into mainstream national life.

But this is not to say that the novel gives up on education entirely. On the contrary. At its core, the indigenist novel works to highlight the presence of the indigenous segment of the

population and its oppression, and to advocate justice for them. This itself constitutes an educational enterprise, albeit for another audience, i.e. the reader. This is all the more so in the case of a novel like Alegría's, which was translated into many languages, and praised and embraced by an international audience. Mario Vargas Llosa, speaking of what he terms the Latin American "novela primitiva"—a category that, for him, includes *El mundo*—notes that "el historiador y el sociólogo tienen un abundante material de trabajo: la novela se ha vuelto censo, dato geográfico, descripción de usos y costumbres, atestado etnológico, feria regional, muestrario folklórico" ("Novela Primitiva" 29). Vargas Llosa here sharply demarcates the "novela primitiva" from the "novela de creación" (a current he identified himself with) and argues for the greater artistic value of the latter. However, what he also fails to recognize as a contribution of these works (beyond their role in the larger journey of the novel form in Latin America) is the educational need they fulfil for the mostly non-indigenous reading public of these books. In *El mundo*, authorial interventions are a pedagogical tool to educate the reader. This intent is visible, for instance, in the following passage on the harvesting activity in Rumi:

> Las mazorcas eran llevadas al *cauro*, hecho de magueyes, dentro del cual se las iba colocando una junto a la otra, verticalmente, en la operación llamada *mucura* [...].En el norte del Perú, el quechua y los dialectos corrieron, ante el empuje del idioma de blancos y mestizos, a acuartelarse en las indiadas de la Pampa de Cajamarca y el Callejón de Hauaylas. Pero siempre dejaron atrás, para ser cariñosamente defendidas, las antiguas palabras agrarias, enraizadas en el pecho de los hombres como las plantas en la tierra. (497; ch. V)

Through passages such as these (and there are other instances throughout the book), the reader enters a temporality beyond the narrative framework. Thus, the author interprets the indigenous

world and guides the readership on the context within which the work is to be seen. Instances like these also highlight, once more, that the book is meant to benefit and "school" an audience that is distant from the unlettered *comuneros* depicted within it.

Finally, Alegría grapples with the theme of education not just with his characters and his readers. He also questions himself as the creator of a novelistic world which he knows better than others, perhaps, but still not as well as he may think, through the interaction between the flautist *comunero* Demetrio and the three urban artists in chapter twenty. As an *indigenista* writer (though Alegría did not like to use the term for himself), the dialogue of (mis)communication between the indigenous artist and the non-indigenous urban artist in Peru in this chapter, reflects his own curious position as an "outsider-insider" to the world. The chapter deals with three educated men—a folklorist, a painter, and a writer—discussing a story about a rabbit and a fox that they have just heard Amadeo tell in the street. When they spot Demetrio, the painter wants to hire him to pose as his model, and they draw him into a conversation. Demetrio is witness to the conversation between these three "strange" men; he hears them speak sympathetically of the indigenous community, which both surprises and pleases him.

Each of the three urbane figures represents at least part of the task Alegría has set himself. It is a dialogue he is carrying out with himself, about his views on art, culture, and its connection with reality and justice. Further, it is Demetrio's (mostly quiet) presence in this dialogue that indicates Alegría's attempts to imagine an indigenous appraisal of his work, as he experiments with switching the gaze back and forth between the creatorand object of *indigenista* works, instead of fixing it in one direction. For instance, on hearing the folklorist's reflections on the folktale—the rabbit, symbolizing the *indio*, getting the better of the mighty fox, the boss—

Demetrio is not entirely sure “si el cuento quería representar eso” although he is made happy by the thought itself (890; ch. XX).

Although Demetrio has little dialogue compared to these three men, their exchange brings out the differences between the two worlds. When the writer character asks Demetrio who had composed the *huaino* he had played for them, the latter replies: “no sé quién lo sacó. Entre nosotros, nunca se sabe quién saca los cantos” (895). The artist from the author-centric cultural world (that of Alegría himself) is confronted with an artist from the indigenous universe, where the creator does not take precedence over the creation. Alegría as author seems to be checking his own expectations about what his writing can accomplish, and reminding himself (as well as his readers) about the limitations of his interpretation in authentically portraying this world so different from his own.

In this sense, the end of the chapter is somewhat disappointing, or perhaps, shows how Alegría only goes so far. Demetrio is moved by a painting (of a cactus) in the artists' lodgings. He tells the painter: “frente a mi casa hay un maguey y aura comprendo que él también mira como éste” (894). Later, home and half-drunk, he lies contemplating the cactus outside the window. As he looks on, all he manages to articulate are the words “maguey, maguey,” over and over. The subsequent intervention by the omniscient narrator is then somewhat counterproductive , as he tells us, in a long paragraph in the first person, what Demetrio is saying “con las palabras silenciosas de la emoción” (897). The novelizing artist returns to the podium, more specifically to the comfort zone of interpreting the silence and Demetrio's emotion, now through an outpouring of a page-long internal monologue in literary language (evidently unmarked by subalternity). Readers, of course, should doubt if that is what a figure like Demetrio might have really trying to say.

Regarding the *indigenista* writer as "outsider-insider," we are reminded of Benito once more, and his role as an "insider-outsider" in Rumi upon his return. Undoubtedly, besides becoming mayor of the community, he also slips into the role of *maestro* for them. While he has spent a good part of his life in the outside world, his heart is undoubtedly rooted in the community and its welfare. Yet, it is worth asking to what extent the solutions he brings to Rumi are organically its own? It might be useful to cite Kim Díaz on a lesson from the thought of Bolivian thinker Fausto Reinaga, "that only those who are intimately familiar with the details of their own situation can (and should) prescribe solutions to their unique problems" (195). Benito's status is particularly ambiguous, as the learning he brings to Rumi, while some of it may be useful, can also be interpreted as the superimposition of a foreign framework (e.g., a historical materialist understanding) and its solutions. Again, one of the principal reasons for this drawback is the suddenness with which the change in consciousness is sprung upon both the *comuneros* and the readers.

3.1.2 Routes via Roots in Chotti Munda

Unlike *El mundo*'s Rumi, the desire for getting schooled in reading and writing enters the picture somewhat late in Devi's novel. Near the beginning, when it depicts the period after Birsa's revolt, the Munda community is under too much strain to have any concerns except their day-to-day survival. Literacy begins to occupy their minds much later, mainly after Chotti's bitter experience with the Lala, who demands that the piece of barren land he had granted Chotti, be returned. Seeing him unabashedly go back on his word, Chotti poses this question: "Munda doesn' read, so how does he know worda mouth won' stand true?" (140; ch. 10). In some ways, this is a turning point in Chotti's thinking about "booklarnin'" (288; ch. 15). Previously, his attitude had been quiet resentment over the connection between literacy and wealth

accumulation. He had focused on literacy's exclusionary aspects, as a system that had allowed and aided the *diku* (outsiders) to become rich drawing from *adivasi* territory, while the tribals stood by and struggled to make even ends meet: "It's given to them who *know ta take*. We're not readin'-writin' folk [...]. We know nothin'" (124; ch. 9). With time, Chotti's perspective changes from "what's t' use larnin? Mundas've nothin' to call their own no more" (124) to actively seeking ways for the younger ones to pick up these skills. He himself takes a step in the direction of this reading-writing world when he manages to get a written document for a piece of stony land bought on installments: "an achievement" in the eyes of Chhagan and others (168; ch. 11).

The exclusion from such learning is many-tiered: the law proclaims school for everyone but lacks implementation; moreover, besides bullying from other children, schoolteachers, too, chase away Mundas and Hindu low caste kids from school ("What'll ye do with school? Go herd cows" [136; ch. 10)]). Even the Christian Mission-educated Munda girls find it hard to get work and end up in menial construction jobs. In these circumstances, even literacy has to become a homegrown event in the novel. Chotti sees a glimmer of hope in the form of the Mundas'*pahan* (priest), and Chhagan, each of whom has some knowledge of reading and writing Hindi (the dominant diku language) and reckoning. A tentative step in that direction is taken. He requests the *pahan* to teach Munda boys in the evening. Gradually, "by way of Pahan's infinite perseverance," a few boys learn the alphabet, and "easy addition and subtraction by counting the seed of the myrobalan. This seems a great gift to Chotti" (187; ch. 11).

At the same time, the novel also contests any notion that literacy might provide straightforward access to knowledge of what is to their advantage, or that official policymakers would want to easily provide tools for such access. Chotti, who doubts government plans to build a school for the Mundas, raises a serious question about the content of such education, and its

suspicious link with actual empowerment: “Won’ teach so we understan’ our rights” (124; ch. 9). Learning is not a simple matter and, by itself, provides little relief, in a scenario where even the moneylender’s books are a maze impossible to navigate. In a rare moment of having the upper hand with the moneylender, Chotti tells him that Chhagan and the *pahan* will examine his books from their side, to see who owes how much. They meet with little success, losing their way in the sea of convoluted reckoning (120; ch. 86 pdf).

However, without discarding the impulse towards a knowledge of reading and writing, what actually bears fruit in the novel is aculturally-rooted learning that they decide for themselves, which takes place informally, gradually, and whose effects become comprehensible only towards the end. Whether it be the coaching Dhani provides to the adolescent Chotti, or the Munda boys who become Chotti’s disciples in archery, this is the “education” that actually empowers the characters in the text. Replying to the police officer’s remark that, with his sure aim, he could have done wonders with a rifle in hand, Chotti dismisses the idea of swapping bow and arrow for a gun: “A man-man shoots an arrer [...]. A man-zero shoots a bullet” (6; ch. 1). Here, he challenges the idea of the gun as the next evolutionary step, and defies the logic identifying progress with the values of modernity, in this case, technological advancement. By the end of the book, Devi’s protagonist—who had feared the loss of Mundas’ distinct identity, and rued the bow and arrow becoming a “toy” wielded only at fairs—is able to re-establish the power of this symbol, resurrecting it as a weapon. Compare this to the end of *El mundo*, where the eerie silence of death and destruction is broken only by the threatening approach of “el estampido de los máuseres” (943; ch. XXIV), announcing the victory of a violent modernity that takes pride in its technological prowess and its ability to inflict increasingly greater damage.

What is also significant is that they seek this learning of their own will: Chotti from Dhani, and young Mundas from Chotti. On the other hand, book-learning is still something of an alien nature; this is, among the reasons Chhagan recounts for the children's resistance to going to school, and lack of book-learning: "we're not school folks, ye've to hit 'em hard ta send 'em to school" (136; ch. 10).

Here, we should recall the still-enduring trauma caused by the residential/ boarding school systems for indigenous children, "common in much of the world until a generation ago, particularly in places taken over by European colonists" (Corry 239). Kim Díaz also cites this as among the instances of brutality by a misplaced indigenism bent on imposing standards of European civilization on the indigenous peoples of the Americas (180). Noting this aspect of the cultural genocide of indigenous communities in the United States, Felix Padel writes that from the late nineteenth century, "a conscious policy of 'detribalising' them was pursued by forcibly taking children away from their families and putting them in schools where any attempt to maintain traditional customs or speak tribal languages was punished" (331). According to Stephen Corry, the practice yielded "extraordinarily damaging" results for these children—who, in many cases, were driven to drugs, crime, even suicide—and "established a vicious cycle which still cascades down the generations" (239).

While the context and experience of settler colonies such as North America, Australia, and New Zealand is necessarily not the same as that of Latin America or of British-occupied India, a discussion of this phenomenon isrelevant in the light of their similarities with "factory schools" in India aimed at tribal children. A short documentary by human-rights organisation, Survival International, advocates indigenous communities' control over the education of their own children, and captures growing unease among *adivasi* communities as well as activists, in

the state of Orissa, over the education imparted at one such residential school with over 25,000 tribal children ("Factory Schools"). In fact, the video directs us to make connections with residential school history by including the audio testimony of a member of a Native American community who recounts the experience of his siblings in these schools. Although the tribal children and groups from India depicted here do not seem to have been admitted into the school forcibly, but likely with family consent, there are reasonable grounds to doubt the level of transparency in the process of persuasion involved. A*divasi* parents, interviewed for the film, underline how the schooling is distancing their children from their traditional life skills (such as farming), inducing inferiority about their own languages, dress and customs, and promoting disrespect toward parents and elders; meanwhile, activists draw a connection between the values imparted at school and an agenda backed by powerful (mining) corporations in the region, geared towards creating dependency, and thus a labour force for the market (2:50-7:50). Enforced schooling is, as Corry points out, "the most powerful weapon used [...] to instil in tribal children values which are different, often contradictory, to those held by their own societies'' (2). Between the two poles of the denial of schooling through official and structural apathy (in the novels), and these histories of enforced schooling meant to alienate children from their communities, then, there is no real choice, as both indicate the imposition of an external will, designed to deny rather than grant real citizenship rights.

External imposition, in a postcolonial but neoliberal world market, increasingly takes place under more sophisticated garb. Children are not "forcibly" taken from their parents in the case of this school for tribal children; it is likely that many families (if not all) gave them up for education actually thinking it will improve their lot. But the loss of cultural self-esteem does not take very long to sink in.The often painful/ even resentful testimonies of the family members in

the short film remind us that colonial structures and colonial thinking perpetuate themselves best where it hurts most and in the area of least resistance - the children. The seed of Dhani's memory germinating and taking root in the young mind of Chotti imagines a resistant, liberating counternarrative in this sense.

The novel is interspersed with numerous examples in which Chotti saves the day for his people(s) by taking recourse to traditional knowledge systems.The drought is one such case. Chotti leads the Mundas and Chhagan's group, successfully locating underground water wells upstream. Thus they are saved from falling further into the moneylender's clutches, who would have taken advantage of the situation to trap more of them into bonded labour contracts in exchange for water. It is on this occasion that Chotti also reflects with some melancholy on this loss of traditional knowledge: "t' Mundas allus [always] forgit their own" (113; ch. 8). Similarly, it is on Chotti's suggestion that both the Mundas and Chhagan's group "take atom by atom through tiny holes from the national economy," bringing "scummy mud [to enliven the land] cryin' like a babe sick wit' hunger" (174; ch. 11). The land in question is the small piece of stony land that Chotti and his family have managed to buy in installments. These are just a couple of instances where Chotti is their teacher, re-schooling his community in forgotten knowledge, while simultaneously educating the readers about their well-developed knowledge systems.

Chhagan's mother, too, has the reputation of being a healer for women and children. Even the Lala's family swears by her skills. Thus, the novel recuperates education in the form of these communities' indigenous systems, whether agricultural, economic, medicinal,or related to political democracy. These systems and know-how are a core component of their culture, and, in the novel, are mechanisms that enable their resilience despite extremely adverse conditions.

In an interview conducted when the author was well into her eighties, Devi stands by her ideal of social responsibility in writing, which for her, "absolutely has to be there"; the discussion of "writing and social conscience as separate issues," she says, is a recent trend (Chakraborty, M. 285). Devi's writings, especially her works focusing on *adivasis* that became her staple from the 1970s, are intended to awaken and educate a social conscience about these groups in literate society. In *Tribal Peoples for Tomorrow's World*, Corry provides an example of damaging discourses about indigenous peoples that have lasted centuries and continue well into the present:

> In an attempt to save their lands, Amazon Indians blocked roads and rivers in Peru for some weeks in 2009. Government forces then attacked them, provoking the killing of several policemen hostages the Indians were holding. Such an uprising had been unprecedented for generations. In Peru's 1742 Indian revolt, the authorities characterized the Indians trying to protect their lands as "savages." They said the same in 2009. (209)

Contemporary realities of the discrimination indigenous peoples continue to face, attest to how this educational function continues to matter.

More than anything else, Devi's novel is meant to educate the *reader*, who is repeatedly confronted with the difference of the Munda world through the orality of the Mundari language: "Yes, all's a story in Chotti Munda's life. Munda language has no script. So they turn significant events into story, and hold them as saying, as song. That's their history as well" (22; ch. 3). This story then, is also history, and demands more serious attention. The literate reader, especially the one unfamiliar with oral histories, will see her notion of history (written, and supposedly in stark contrast to story), challenged through such oral song-making. Moreover, in some ways, this also brings to mind the *diku* expectation in the story that the *adivasis* adapt their oral ways to adhere

to a system based on writing. The repetition, and the songs—even the book's abundance of dialogue—do not just put the reader face to face with the otherness of the Munda world, but also necessitate a certain gear-switching between two worldviews. This could lead us to reflect on the far greater predicament of the Munda characters in the textual world (and in history).

Dhani provides a glimpse into other ways of reading and knowing when he asks Chotti to feel the "design" scratched on his machete: "Me lord [Birsa] wrote his name by his own hand there, he said. This is his name. Ye don' know how to read, nor I. No need. If ye feel it with yer fingers t' spell'll enter yer fingers as well" (13; ch. 2). Dhani's and Chotti's *sensing* of the (otherwise inaccessible) written word, is an echo of Devi's position; as Spivak notes that what Devi is doing is "to read [...] between the unwritten lines of the tribal story, the tribal experience, the songs" (Devi, "Telling History xi). Dhani cannot read but can *feel* his lord's name, even help transmit its meaning to Chotti. Similarly, Devi reads (and interprets) the unwritten tribal story for the readers. Through the figures of Dhani and Chotti, who remain unlettered in the novel, Devi is also manifesting her own imperfect position. In a scenario where written and oral cultures necessarily co-exist, illiteracy will not obstruct her main characters from learning, as well as communicating the message onward. Similarly, the fact that Devi does not belong to the Mundas' oral universe may be a barrier, but she is optimistic about the possibilities of a productive, albeit imperfect, communication. But in addition to this optimism about being able to convey the message to her readership, Devi is also forthcoming about the limitations of such an educative intervention, and the well-meaning, but still mistaken, responses it frequently evokes: "I'm always receiving earnest offers from people who want to go to the Kheria Sabars [another *adivasi* group she has written about] and work for them. I always tell them, they won't accept you. What have you done for them to accept you? You don't know tribals. [...] These people

come with well-meaning ideas, this sort of approach, and tribals have a lot of resistance"(Devi, "Telling History" xviii). Clearly, reading these books is not going to help us to "know," much less understand, the tribals; their best bet is to cultivate an empathetic approximation to an oppressed other, their situation and worldview.

The novel presents the different faces of knowledge with respect to the Mundas in the non-*adivasi* literate society. It is careful to distinguish the liberating use of such knowledge over the overzealous or merely well-meaning one. For example, after Dhani goes missing despite prohibition on his movement, it is "a certain Mundari-knowing Munda-enthusiastic Father" who helps uncover his possible whereabouts, helping the police trace him (21; ch. 2). However, the failures of a bookish education are best manifested in the well-meaning but misguided figure of Amlesh Khurana, the Indian-origin scholar from overseas, invited by the government of India to conduct an economic assessment of the area for 'development' purposes. Spivak describes him as "very well meaning, but he has this artificial picture [...] so he tries to help through this totally unrealistic idea, he wants [to see] Munda villages, he wants leper villages, he wants untouchable villages, he thinks that everything is in nice little compartments" (Devi, "Telling History" xviii). The distance between Khurana's ideas about India and the actual complex realities of the place is a critique of modern education that emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of reality. His case also works to question the privileged position accorded to books and writing as reliable means to the truth.

3.1.3 Section Conclusion

While formal schooling is not rejected in either novel, it is not found to be the answer to their needs. It does not prepare them to address their actual concerns. Yet, literacy *is* sought in both books, as the technology they consider to be one of the principal reasons and promoters of their

exclusion. The attitude towards a school education in *Chotti Munda* is, at best, mistrust. Reading and writing, Chotti feels, will enable them to access a hitherto obscure world that has been pushing them into greater subjection. The community attempts to move in this direction, making some progress. Even this requires great perseverance and the efforts of a few members who manage to get some children to learn the alphabet and basic arithmetic. But what is most significant in terms of subaltern empowerment, is that the education that actually succeeds here is homegrown and culturally-rooted. The process is slow, and drawn out, beginning with Chotti as a young boy receiving this informal training from Dhani. And then, onward to other young Munda men under Chotti's guidance. Education is acquired in situvia the sharing of histories. This is the passage of the arrow, of resistance and knowledge, and the knowledge of resistance. This is what makes it possible to link a rebellious past with dreams of a decolonized future. And it culminates in the novel's final scene: the bow and arrow, at this point, are recuperated not just as the announcement of a protest and possible rebellion, but also as markers of a self-respecting subaltern identity.

El mundo shows a more sustained interest in a modern education for its children, but mainly limited to the first one-third of the book. Rosendo's dream of a school for Rumi's youth remains unfulfilled, as they are caught in the aftermath of the (first) dispossession. The idea of the school then re-emerges, transformed, with Benito's return. His return points the *comuneros* towards a schooling tailored to their needs; at least the readers, who have seenthe tragic fate of the emigrants in the story, will vouch for it. The teaching that Benito brings back—gathered from varied experiences working and witnessing oppression of indigenous origin-labourers in a number of places, serving in the army, living in Lima, etc.—is something like a Marxist consciousness. His idea unifies the *comuneros* under the common goal of defending their land,

livelihood and economic sovereignty. However, Benito's ideas about what is holding them back suggests the need for a displacement of its cultural systems, and replacement by other, modern ones. Despite his vehement opposition to Amenábar in principle, the definition of the end towards which he is working—"*progreso*"—creates uncomfortable points of contact with the *gamonal*. Instead of cultural resurgence, the novel's final chapters suggest cultural loss.

Yet both books succeed at the level of educating the reader, especially in terms of highlighting the differences between these subaltern groups in novel ways. They problematize the idea of education for these communities as a "good in itself" by stressing the exclusionary force of the world of literacy, a universe to which the reader (and the author) also belong. This self-reflexivity is what makes these novels especially relevant today.

3.2 Solidarities

One of the aims behind choosing these texts and the comparative angle for this thesis was to help imagine new forms of South-South intersections and solidarities in the literary space, especially in the light of ethnic communities (such as those under consideration) facing similar challenges around the globe even when they are geographically separated. How does the idea of solidarity manifest itself and function as resistance in these texts?

Let us start with a working definition of solidarity. David Heyd provides criteria that I subscribe to here. He uses three parameters: local, partial and reflective emotion. He means that solidarity: a) cannot be universal but "applies to the attitude we feel towards some restricted group," who are "mostly strangers yet [who] have in common some particular traits, goals, group interests, collective fate" (56); b) "consists of an "us-them" contrast,and arises when there is a common cause and this cause is never universal [...] solidarity is an essentially political attitude [...] in the sense that distinguishes it from abstract altruism [...] as well as from purely

instrumental or egoistic schemes of cooperation." He adds that it is a "horizontal" and symmetrical relationship between equals (58); c) "is a kind of emotion. [...] a 'reflective emotion'[...] typically mediated by thought and belief. It has a strong ideological component" (59).

Seeking and/or establishing common ground with other groups is a key aspect in each of these novels. In different ways, they imagine or show, and promote, alliances based on solidarity between oppressed groups. Rather than being based merely on shared membership of well-defined groups, the solidarities here are more wide-ranging: they manage to forge links beyond limiting identities, and frequently derive from identification with a set of values, or from reeling under similar oppressive conditions such as debt traps, forced/bonded labour, and meagre wages. These solidarities occur at individual as well as collective levels.

In *Chotti Munda*, the solidarity that gets centrestage is the one that comes to pass through theMundas—a community without distinctions of caste (an aspect that differentiates them from the Hindus)—beginning to work in close association with the so-called "untouchables," the lowest rung among the Hindus. Gradually, under Chotti's guidance, we see these groups collectively decide their course of action to counter the excesses of the upper-caste Hindu landowner/moneylender. In *El mundo*, we will see how solidarities are indicated through the figure of Benito Castro, but also (and more indirectly) by means of other emigrants from Rumi, following the community's first displacement. All the c*omuneros* who leave to try their luck elsewhere, experience first-hand the misery, even barbarity, of life outside the community, whether in *haciendas,* rubber extraction, mines, or coca farms. Here we shall examine a range of such instances from these novels that either become strong bonds leading to affirmative and

resistant action, or other more minor ones, which manage to hint at something potentially powerful even though they do not develop into something as influential in the story itself.

3.2.1 The Praxis of Solidarity in Chotti Munda

As described in previous chapters, "over the nineteenth century the tribals were increasingly exposed to the twin pressures of growing encroachments on forests and the loss of land, brought about by the [landowner-moneylender-government] nexus that was based on exploitation and cradled and defended by the legal and administrative systems introduced by colonialism" (Pati 8). In the early part of Devi's novel, Dhani similarly defines the main agents responsible for exploiting the Mundas: the colonial master or administration, and the Hindu outsiders or *dikus*, especially in the form of moneylenders, who through cunning, frequently become the majority landowners in these regions. Dhani's own family is caught in such a relation with the moneylender. But in addition to exposing the role of these oppressive forces, he also voices the emptiness of individual rebellions. He himself may refuse to give bonded labour, but he knows this is not enough. As he tells one character when she seems adamant about not giving bonded labour anymore: "If everyone labours on bond, and ye alone don', comes to nothin'...Ye wanna die fightin' alone?" (12; ch. 2). Talking of his non-partisan participation, cutting across ethnic lines in bygone revolts, he says: "I haven't sown me seeds all in one bitta ground like ye. I don't recall today where I went for t' Santals' big revolt, their *Hul,*[32] where I sharpened me arrer in t' Sardar's fight. This me Lord taught me, blood kin is not ever'thin'" (11).

Indeed, the end of the book replaces small, solitary rebellions with something transcendent, a fresh and more inclusive manifestation of Dhani's principle. Dhani had revealed a history of solidarities between *adivasi* groups by underlining his participation in different

[32]"Rebellion, movement, agitation, revolt. Synonymous with the great Santhal Rebellion of 1855. Santhals, Mundas and Oraons are the three largest ethnic tribal groups in eastern and east-central India" (Spivak, Notes 328).

uprisings. The book imagines, and ends with, new ones; the final moment is a grand gesture of solidarity in support of Chotti. This follows the killing of a pair of political goons (Romeo and Pahalwan) who had been terrorizing the labourers among the Mundas and the *Hindu* outcastes for years, with little intervention from police. They had been forcibly taking cuts from their meagre wages, and harassing the women. The Lala had turned to Romeo and his accomplices in an attempt to subdue the field hands into continuing to give bonded labour even after it became known the practice had been formally outlawed; the result had been the loss of several innocent lives in the village. Ironically, it is the killing of these ruffians that provokes panic and rage among the powers that be—Lala, Harbans (the brick kiln owner), and the police.

Chotti learns that a team of young Munda men carried out the killings to prevent further outrage and violence. It is to save them and the community from indiscriminate police action, that Chotti assumes responsibility for the deed, onstage at the Chotti fair, in the presence of people from surrounding villages, as well as figures of state authority. Following his defiant confession—which evokes disbelief and shock from the authorities—the S.D.O. (sub-divisional officer) goes forward, but before he can lay hands on Chotti, "instantly a thousand adivasis raise their bows in space and cry, No! The non-adivasis raise restraining hands. Chotti on one side, S.D.O. on the other, and in-between a thousand bows upraised in space. And a warning announced in many upraised hands" (327; ch. 17).

The unity of the *adivasis* and the non-*adivasi* group of outcaste Hindus is key to the unfolding of this scene. The coming together of the Mundas, under the de facto leadership of Chotti, and Hindu outcastes, led by Chhagan, symbolizes the solidarity of the oppressed sections in the book. First coming together during times of collective stress such as famine and drought, these groups establish a lasting bond. Spivak writes, "Chotti Munda repeatedly dramatizes

subaltern solidarity: Munda, Oraon [another *adivasi* group] and the Hindu outcastes must work together," adding that "the text charts the remote possibility of a resistant subalternity" (Spivak, Afterword 334). Indeed, as Chotti tells Chhagan earlier on in the book: "Our lot's t' same as y'alls. The old days wit' real Munda villages r'gone...There's one diff'rence. Ye have caste stuff...We have no caste diff'rence. And I bring it up, cos t'village is now all mixed. Ye and usdies together in famine, drought, and bonded work. ... if need be ye and us go together, I say"(115; ch. 8). From then on, joint action and a thinking-for-all is repeatedly enacted in the novel. Beginning with a successful search for water upstream during a period of drought, the unity is built gradually from the ground up. This instance is their first collective victory as they manage to dodge Lala's attempts to take advantage of the dire situation and extract more thumbprints in exchange for water and food. Later, Chhagan too supports Chotti in an especially tense situation when the latter comes into conflict with the moneylender over abusive language unacceptable to the Mundas. This is an important moment as it helps seal the groups' unity, despite Lala's malicious attempts to the contrary.

However, this unity is not without its tensions; it comes at a price. Chotti foresees it will entail weakening of the distinct Munda identity: "Chotti returns home but the clouds don't lift from his mind. The day is coming. Mundas will not be able to live with their identity. In all national development work they will have to be one with those who, like Chhagan, are the oppressed of the land [...]. Then there'll be a shirt on his body, perhaps shoes on his feet. Then the 'Munda' identity will live only at festivals—in social exchange" (126; ch. 9). There is a certain anguish in Chotti, "a degree of regret," as he "accepts that cultural identity must be [...] museumized" (Spivak, Afterword 334).

But the power of the final scene, one of "united struggle"with upraised *adivasi* bows and non-*adivasi* hands, works to dispel any doubts about the desirability of this solidarity. In its emphasis on the crowd, the people, it is symbolic of the agency of the mass, bringing to mind once more, Guha's phrase, the "politics of the people." It is the people's silent presence, the low drumming, their complete and dignified acquiescence to Chotti, which add intensity to this final scene, as he makes his way into the annals of tribal history, symbolically following in the steps of Birsa Munda and Dhani. Chotti had often complained that nobody was willing to "think anything from bottom up.Many of them are like that, Chotti will do the thinking. The leader of the hopeless. They'll just obey orders" (169; ch. 11). Here, the crowd surpasses all expectations, perhaps taking even Chotti by surprise; in this instant, the oppressed of the land assume responsibility to stand up for Chotti, and for themselves. Where in the previous chapter we spoke of the collective as history-teller through song-making, here, the mass announces itself as the actual creator of this history.

Chotti differs from Dhani in his ability to successfully call for and lead action. We have noted that the main reason for Chotti's success as a leader in the village is his success in forging solidarity with these non-Munda groups. However, he is also selective and finds that not all solidarities are as viable even when driven by good intentions. Though he clearly feels sympathy for the young "Naxalite" Swarup, emaciated and bespectacled, part of a group fighting for *adivasi* rights and dreaming of "a separate state for aboriginals" (274; ch. 14), he also gives their project a reality check. As he tells Swarup, there are no *adivasi*-only villages in the region; the realities of the place are all mixed-up; you cannot fight for the rights of one oppressed group like the Mundas and discount those of another, the outcaste Hindus: "If ye gieth' adivasis a state, where do th' untouchables go? They die our deaths too" (275). Thus, through Chotti, Devi makes

the point that any struggle, however commendable its goals, has to base itself on current realities and take into account groups suffering common injustices.

The worsening of political repression in the country (through the imposition of the "Emergency" in June 1975 by the then prime minister) has repercussions for Chotti's area as well; violence takes a turn for the worse as both political ruffians and investigating officials become a prominent presence. Under the circumstances, state agencies are thirsty for the blood of radical groups such as the one Swarup was part of. Chotti helps the group find safer locations to hide; a few Munda youth also join the group. The officers have an inkling of "Naxalites" hiding in the area and of their sympathy for the *adivasis*. In fact, they are prepared to sacrifice tribal lives to goons like Romeo, simply to induce the Naxal fighters to step out from their hideout.

The history of the Naxalites is complex. Chotti's help to the group, combined with his ideological challenges to their thinking, could be seen as a precursor to how the situation developed in India's tribal belt, often the stronghold of this radical ideology and fighters. Explaining the Naxalites' choice to make their base in one such region (Bastar), Felix Padel indicates it was founded on the "system of endemic exploitation that has thrived there [...]. Tribal elders gradually learnt to see Naxalites as a lesser evil, especially since Naxalite ideology was couched in terms of combating the corruption and exploitation" (319). Yet, despite their armed insurgency ostensibly for the rights of these oppressed groups, Padel does not see fit to view the Naxalites as the true successors to tribal insurgents who fought the iniquities of British rule; he points out that "the Naxal leadership, like the ideology, is non-tribal"(318-319). Solidarities, while powerful, can have their limits.

There is yet another kind of solidarity in the book that invites interest: that of the "mad *Sahib,*" the Englishman Hugh Ronaldson. The younger brother of a colonial officer, he is an artist with anthropological interests: he draws, and "discovers that in spite of his failure to do anything useful in Britain, he has developed a skill in learning Munda language" (42; ch. 3). After accidentally meeting Chotti, they strike up a friendship. He even goes with Chotti to see their house: "He has many wishes, to see a Munda's house, to see the paintings on the wall" (41). This "crazy gormen" (any white man, for the Mundas, represents authority and therefore is "gormen" or of the "government") arouses much curiosity in the village. The Munda women even compose a song: "Gormen has come to our place / [...] hasn't brought a gun / Hasn't killed us folks..."(41). Ronaldson defends the Mundas in a discussion with his brother, who is suspicious of the group's rebellious legacy.Later, he publishes a book containing the portraits of such "dubious" figures as Dhani and Chotti, much to the discomfort, and against the instructions, of his brother (54). It is telling that he had seen, and drawn a picture of, Dhani, the day the latter waskilled, proof of his bond and affinity with Chotti. Through his genuine interest inthe Mundas and his sense of outrage at bonded labour, among other things, Ronaldson extends a form of intellectual solidarity to the Mundas, cutting across racial, cultural, and class lines. As a representative of literate society drawn to the *adivasi* world, he also reflects Devi's position. It is mentioned that he wishes "to write a book to inform the reader about Munda villages and the Mundas," which is of course what Devi is in part doing with her own fiction (42). With this meta-narrative, Devi may be guiding us to an ideal (her ideal?) of the writer who acts and writes with a social conscience, and has the capacity to engage respectfully and productively even with a distant "otherness." Thus, while keeping the Munda-outcaste alliance in the limelight, the novel

also pays attention to the potential of these other external “friendships” as well, be it the *diku* boy Swarup (“booklarned [...] dad’s a lawyer” [305; ch. 16]) or Ronaldson.

3.2.2 Imagining Solidarities through El mundo

Alegría’s novelistic production, despite its many achievements, both as part of the *indigenista* literary current and as a Peruvian classic, has been criticized for its technical “imperfections.” For example, reviewing an edited version of *El mundo* in 1945 (for classroom use in North America), Donald D. Walsh notes that:

> The original text is more than five hundred pages in length, and at first glance it wouldseem a hopeless task to reduce it to the proper length for classroom use. But the novel is not closely knit in plot; it is a *loose interweaving* of many individual stories of life in the community, and the editors have made a most *skillful selection of interest without reducing noticeably the value* of the novel as a work of art or as a social document. (717-718; emphasis mine)

However, critics such as Tomas G. Escajadillo and Antonio Cornejo Polar question such evaluations of “disorder” by proposing their own readings of what are seen as unnecessary additions in the whole. Escajadillo sees them not as a sign of a loose structure but as a conscious narrative choice; for him, these interpolated episodes are meant to illuminate what he considers of the central principles guiding the story: the idea that the community is the only place in which the Andean indigenous can live peaceably and with dignity (“Trayectoria y sentido de la peripecia de los ‘comuneros emigrados’” 47). Meanwhile, Cornejo Polar finds these episodes “allow a comparison between the indigenous community and the rest of national society, which leads to the affirmation of the great superiority of the communitarian system over any other form of social organization” (*Writing* 141). The episodes relating to Rumi emigrants, comprising

nearly a third of the novel, play an important role also in relation to the theme of solidarity. We are aware that after the first court verdict favouring don Alvaro Amenábar, the *comuneros* decide to move uphill, to Yanañahui. Several subsequent chapters relate the experiences of Rumi inhabitants who leave to try their luck in different parts of the country. The resistance proposed in *El mundo* is expansive, suggesting solidarity and seeking to integrate the struggles of the Andean indigenous people into the larger struggles of the oppressed in Peru.

As I have noted, *El mundo* owes much to the ideas of Mariátegui (1895-1930) who wrote: "La solución del problema del indio tiene que ser una solución social. Sus realizadores deben ser los propios indios. [...] A los indios les falta *vinculación nacional*. Sus protestas han sido siempre regionales. Esto ha contribuido, en gran parte, a su abatimiento" (*Siete ensayos* 27; emphasis mine). The departure of many of Rumi's inhabitants from the community can be seen as setting in motion such a "vinculación nacional." The exodus *mobilizes* Rumi, through a scattering of its people (Amadeo in Chap 10, Calixto in 13, Augusto in 15, and Juan in 19). These mobilizations help locate them *within* the larger struggles of oppressed classes—mainly workers—mirroring Rumi's fight against abuse and exploitation. One works in a coca plantation, another in rubber extraction, and yet another in a mine. This comprises an "education" for Rumi's *comuneros*—outside the school that remains unbuilt—as they make connections with the struggles of others and become conscious of the miserable life and hazardous work conditions in each case. Amadeo becomes aware of the vicious debt cycle of coca plantation workers, and Calixto experiences, and is killed in, police violence quelling a miners' protest. Meanwhile, Augusto is witness to the unfettered exploitation and forced labour inflicted on Amazonian inhabitants by rubber barons. The struggles of Rumi, and by extension, Peru's indigenous communities, are inserted into a

larger national context, providingan opportunity to establish relations of solidarity with other exploited groups.

The drawback is that, even at the textual level, this enterprise remains largely individual, and limited in time and space for each of these emigrants. Except Benito Castro—"who has come to understand something of social dynamics in his pilgrimage through the enemy's universe" (Cornejo Polar, *Writing* 143)—no character who could share such experiences and perhaps mobilize a more effective resistance, returns to Rumi. The solidarity is there for the reader to gauge, but not for Rumi to experience, except imaginatively. Even Benito, who has been out of Rumi and on the move throughout the book until his return in the twenty-first chapter (the book has twenty-four), takes his time before paying attention to the workers' union movement during his time in Lima. His stance in the matter remains ambivalent through most of his early association with "syndicalist leader" Lorenzo Medina and others, a change occurring only when he hears stories of indigenous grievances read out by his friend from a newspaper: more such stories from all parts of the country. These rouse Benito's attention, inducing him to share his own experiences of injustice and brutality, besides prompting his desire to learn to read. The incorporation of fragments from newspaper stories of the time also shows Alegría's desire to validate his thesis of oppression in the country with real-life instances.

While solidarities between groups are imagined but do not take off in the novel, the book abounds in instances of solidarity between individuals. The young idealistic lawyer (Correa Zavala) who takes up the case of the community, is one such. Like the three sympathetic non-indigenous artists encountered by Demetrio in the city, Correa is an example of intellectual solidarity driven by the idea of justice for the oppressed. There is also Augusto Maqui, who goes blind in an accident while working on a rubber plantation, but finds companionship in Maibi, the

Amazonian indigenous woman whohas, in turn, suffered great hardship and abuse at the hands of the rubber barons.

The bandit Fiero Vásquez is willing to fight for the community (before the first displacement), but this does not develop into a proper alliance under Rosendo's leadership. The latter is unable to bring himself to trust Fiero completely and accept his help. Following Rosendo's death, however, the integration of some former members of Fiero's band into Rumi indicates achange. In fact, Fiero's adolescent son Fidel, born of his relationship with Casiana (herself an alien in the community, "foránea"), is among the first to perish in Rumi's final resistance to Amenábar. Towards the end, the novel also signals the community making its way towards accepting members whose integration into the community had previously been ridden with tensions. In his time, Rosendo helps evolve the community's idea for better integration of those like Porfirio Medrano, but he also fears that "quedaban algunos reacios a la aceptación y no pasaría mucho rato sin que aprovecharan la crisis en favor de sus prejuicios" (506). It is with Benito that this integration is cemented. Artemio Chauqui, the *comunero* who had always viewed Porfirio with mistrust, is the one who grieves the most at his death towards the end: "Y yo que le falté tantas veces! ¡Yo que pedí que lo botaran! [...] ¡Déjenme agradarlo con algo, más que sea a su cadáver..." (941; ch. XXIV).

It is in this last chapter that Benito expresses his thoughts more clearly, becoming a source of historical memory for the *comuneros* (although very fleetingly), aligning Rumi with the struggles of the *campesinos* across time, as he urges them to defend themselves: "La suerte de los pobres es una y pediremos a todos que nos acompañen. Asíganaremos[...]. Muchos, muchos, desde hace siglos, se rebelaron y perdieron" (940). Escajadillo feels that "al poner este capítulo de lucha armada campesina en una perspectiva histórica, toda la epopeya de Rumi

asume de inmediato una mayor dimensión," and that those who see Rumi's destruction as pessimistic or defeatist, fail to note "la perspectiva histórica que convierte a esta 'derrota' en un mero eslabón de una serie histórica que por fuerza tendrá que terminar con la victoria de 'los pobres'" ("Filiación y derrotero" 154, 158). Examining the resonance of cycles of colonial-era rebellions with the present, Bolivian sociologist Rivera Cusicanqui notes the spiral movement of such historical events: "Los temas retornan pero las disyunciones y salidas son diversas; se vuelve, pero no a lo mismo. Es como un movimiento en espiral. La memoria histórica se reactiva y a la vez se reelabora y resignifica en las crisis y ciclos de rebelión posteriores" (13).

There is another way that we can see *El mundo* and *Chotti Munda* as forming different parts and moments of a larger circuit. *El Mundo* might represent the stage of dispossession and discontent, when a community is first pushed into subjection. *Chotti Munda* could stand for a subsequent chapter, as the story of a community now accustomed to living subjugated, and forgetful of its earlier autonomous existence, gradually becoming reacquainted with its past, and finding the nerve to rise up in protest once more. Read in conjunction, and in dialogue, these two novels also provide possibilities of establishing links of solidarity between them.

3.2.3 Section Conclusion

We have seen examples of both individual and collective solidarities in the two novels. Well-intentioned attempts by individual characters showing support to these communities, represent a mixed bag. Where they are successful, their impact is very limited. When they fail, it is mainly because they were premised on mistaken ideas in the first place.

El mundo's narrative is able to promote the dream of a national solidarity for the indigenous and worker communities, especially from the reader. With its episodes outside of the community—in the Amazon, in the mines, in the city (Lima)—it portrays Rumi as a small part of

the bigger picture of exploitative feudal/capitalist systems in Peru. However, the possible solidarity between Rumi and the indigenous labour force at large is sketched out, but does not actually manifest itself in the country as a whole; it makes an appearance as an imagined group solidarity in Rumi. *Chotti Munda* on the other hand, points toward larger mobilization of support for the *adivasis* (in the form of the Naxalites), but retains its focus on the dynamics as they play out locally. The *adivasi*-outcaste solidarity is first imagined through the Chhoti-Chhagan dynamic, then practised, and finally manifested as part of this journey. What both texts share is a movement by these communities towards greater acceptance of a mixed identity. Chotti's preoccupation with the impact of liaising with Hindu outcastes, on Mundas' distinct identity, and some of Rumi *comuneros*' aversion to accepting outsiders into the fold, are both dealt with in a manner that implies that the gains from solidarity far outweigh the losses.

3.3 Chapter Conclusion

Education in these novels is effective only in so far as it helps redress the economic, political, or racial oppression that these communities face. The means by which these communities obtain this education, this knowledge, does not follow conventional patterns. What succeeds for the characters within the novels is an education acquired experientially instead of through books, but this does not lessen its impact. There is a critique of an education that is divorced from realities on the ground, through such figures as Amlesh Khurana in *Chotti Munda*. Similarly, in *El mundo*, Benito Castro's brand of teaching the *comuneros* by informing them of conditions of subjugation prevailing at large in the country, is also an education that is shown as alive to their contemporary realities.

Chotti Munda, through Chotti, opts for the gradual cultivation of an increasingly strong local alliance between the Mundas and the non-*adivasi* Hindu outcastes. *El Mundo*, through

Benito, helps Rumi imagine a unity with their poor labouring brethren at large, suffering in their condition as the poor and/or indigenous of the country. Thus, while Alegría's novel imagines the possibility of large-scale solidarities for Rumi and the like, that of Devi mobilizes and seeks alliances locally. But in both cases the network of solidarity extends to include the readers. The co-existence of the writers' attempts to novelize these worlds, alongside revelations (to a greater or lesser extent) of their own foreign-ness to them, is an indicator of the potential of other solidarities, with groups that perhaps do not suffer in the same way but may share larger, overarching values of equality, democracy and justice.

It may be useful to briefly assess the relationship between previous chapters and the present one. One thread that connects the two novels is that their imagination of the future is grounded in, and nourished by, collectivities as a guiding principle. This principle of a thinking-for-all also links the representation of their past and present. Neither Rosendo nor Chotti envision a future for themselves as individuals; the title of the very first chapter of *El mundo,* "Rosendo Maqui y la comunidad," is symbolic of this. The future, here—like the past—is imagined in terms of the collective. Without discarding previously-tested forms of resistance—ideological as I have discussed in chapter one, or practical as in chapter two—the communities portrayed by Alegría and Devi are constantly negotiating the present and trying to figure out directions to improve their lot. Armed uprising and revolt are options of the last resort but always on the table. However, they understand that they have to explore new avenues of redress and self-empowerment. This is where education and solidarity come in: the particular brands of education cultivated in these novels, whether Benito's nomadism or Chotti's grounded learning, necessarily lead to a thinking and practice of solidarity. On the other hand, solidarity itself could be said to form the crux of the education these communities imagine.

Finally, I wish to mention something that may have seemed out of place in this chapter in particular, but also more generally in the thesis. References to the residential schooling systems, a phenomenon associated with the so-called First World—North America, Australia—could seem strange in a thesis whose stated purpose is to strengthen south-south solidarities and dialogue. I find some comments of Noam Chomsky's to be helpful. In answer to a question about whether Cuba might "go the way Vietnam has," he creates space for an expansive imagination of solidarity that transcends artificially-created divisions in favour of common concerns:

> Third World solidarity and people to people solidarity between the First and the Third World could allow space for a very different set of developments throughout the Third World altogether. Remember, these divisions are not based on colors on maps. The richest and most powerful country in the world is the United States. But a substantial part of the population, in fact by some criteria a majority of the population, really faces problems not unlike those of the Third World—diminishing incomes, loss of security of work, and so on. [...] Policies which resemble structural adjustment are implemented within the rich countries as well. So American workers and Mexican workers are at last recognizing common interests which they indeed have. (109)

While he is citing the example of workers' common interests, something similar could be said of the indigenous peoples of the world, who inhabit nation-states in both the First and the Third Worlds, and who have, or have had, many issues in common, even as their populations, languages, cultural systems, as well as the degrees and kinds of oppression to which they are subject vary. Testimony to this is thegrowing body of research, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and contributors, that is beginning to offer interconnected overviews of the vast range of communities who belong to this group, without ignoring the specificities of each.

While I have focused on the Peruvian and Indian contexts, I have not shied away from bringing into the conversation examples and references from other countries and regions (including the global North) whenever they are relevant or meaningful to the theme.

Conclusion

Alegría's and Devi's novels, two works written decades apart and in the sociohistorical contexts of two distinct regions, have provided productive points of comparison, both in their convergences and dissimilarities, in their representation of subaltern resistance. We saw patterns on the thematic and also the formal levels of these novels: attention to subaltern communities' relationship to land and nature, historical memory, the primacy of orality in their cultural life, and their adaptation to change are just some of the topics we have discussed in the context of their resistance. In what follows, I briefly review the principal insights gained in each chapter, and connect some of these themes to the present-day scenario, to gauge the extent to which these two texts remain relevant to our time.

1. Review

Chapter one revolved around an examination of ideological markers of difference for the subaltern communities depicted in the two novels. Here, the avenues of subaltern resistance were provided by these groups' systems, beliefs, values, and attitudes, and their relationship to nature and their surroundings, that set them apart from the oppressive forces of mainstream society. Some of the values common to both communities included the prioritising of the common good over individual profit, and also a refusal to classify everything as resource. These aspects place these communities on a higher ethical plane compared to the oppressors. Both *El mundo* and *Chotti Munda* make a strong case in this regard. In some ways, however, *El mundo*, because it portrays an ongoing, living communal system (in contrast to the Mundas' long-forgotten *khuntkatti* communal land ownership pattern) on the sidelines of a dominant feudalism and advancing capitalism, is more visibly persistent on this point. All the "detours" in Alegría's text—including the emigrant stories—also highlight the superiority of the Rumi system. As

Escajadillo has pointed out, "cumplen la función superior de *contraste y antítesis* entre la vida, invariablemente triste y miserable, en diversos escenarios—físicos y espirituales—del mundo andino, y la vida *humana* y digna en la comunidad de Rumi," and leading him towards what he calls the idea at the heart of the novel, that "la comunidad es el único lugar habitable [...] para el campesino andino" ("Los principios estructuradores de *El mundo es ancho y ajeno*" 33; emphases in original).

In the challenge they present to the anthropocentric vision of modernity, these texts prefigure a new protagonism for these communities as the upholders of a renewed environmental ethic that sees the human as a part of a larger ecosystem. This is significant in the present-day world battling a series of climate crises, and a pandemic that has attained global proportions in the span of a few months. It is by creating an identification between the human and the animal world, as also between the human and non-living natural world that *El mundo* conveys this idea, while *Chotti Munda* puts the forest at the heart of its being. The forest, beyond being the place of the unknown, here becomes a place of learning as training ground for Chotti, as well as a sanctuary for the Mundas. While the forest is humanised in *Chotti Munda*, through Dhani who can hear the forest crying, in *El mundo*, Rosendo finds reassurance and solace in the presence of "Taita Rumi," the guardian mountain of the community.

At a time of ongoing environmental crises, Gleb Raygorodetsky dwells on the impact of climate change on indigenous communities worldwide, in his book *The Archipelago of Hope.* He includes the concerns of the Sápara people of the Ecuadorian Amazon, who are fighting oil development to prevent destruction of their sacred rainforest. Gloria Ushigua, of the Association of Sápara Women, tells him that "we must leave the oil where it belongs-in the ground" (154), forcing a radical rethink of priorities. By proposing what she sees as the real solution to the

climate crisis, she holds the extractivist model of economic development responsible for the problem. Similarly, in a 2009 piece on the damage that a bauxite mine in India's Niyamgiri Hills would bring to the local ecosystem and livelihoods—including those of an *adivasi* community[33]—Arundhati Roy notes "an ancient battle and a familiar one, whose story has been played out over centuries in every continent across the world and has had a more or less similar outcome, i.e. the corporations always win. This is commonly known as 'progress'" ("Business as Usual"). Roy also underlines the vital role played by indigenous communities as guardians of the planet's ecological balance in contrast to insatiable corporate greed: "surely it's time to realise that forests, river systems, mountain ranges and people who know how to live in ecologically sustainable ways, are worth more than all the bauxite in the world."

The subaltern communities in these two books are dynamic, negotiating their way forward in the face of developments that challenge their very existence. While they are constrained by external forces, they also actively engage with these forces to find ways to survive. The changes they undergo are not limited to outside circumstances, but include internal modifications within these communities that enable their continuity. The two novels manifest varying levels of such engagement. *Chotti Munda,* as we have seen, is more alive to this aspect, as change is present as an ongoing feature of life rather than contained within the equation between Dhani and his disciple. An ageing Chotti and his generation are observant of and receptive to the changes among the younger sections of their communities.

Yet for all the dynamism and adaptive practices of these subaltern communities as they attempt to cope with change, this does not mean they break ties with the past. Chapter two explored cultural elements that manifest resistance. One of these is the important role played by a sustained sense of historical memory that informs the two groups in these novels. This memory

[33] The community in question is the Dongria Kondh.

is a means to maintain a sense of self, and also represents their will to continuity. The concern with remembering, repeating, and passing on their histories is also one of the main ways in which these novels echo some of the concerns of the Subaltern Studies project, even as both novels *predate* this theoretical/methodological practice. The histories highlighted here are off the beaten track of mainstream history, as we have seen in Alegría's novel. Devi's book does the same by recounting the historical Munda revolt led by Birsa; at the same time, her novel also dramatises the process of song-making as the Mundas' active, collaborative history-recording. This provides a sense of movement to the history of these indigenous groups; it brings their history into the present by imbuing it with a sense of movement and continued presence, in contrast to a history confined to the past.

The particularity of their cultural systems is highlighted. There is an emphasis on (even, constant reminders of) their orality, and the foreign-ness of writing systems to their culture. Perhaps one of the more successful indications of subaltern resistance in both novels is their incorporation, at the formal level, of forms of verbal cultural expression practised by these groups: story in *El mundo* and song in *Chotti Munda.* Allowing the subject matter of their stories to affect them structurally (especially in Devi's novel) reveals the conflicts and tensions that these novels uncover, not only through their narratives but through their very existence as written forms capturing oral language. In Alegría's book, we also find hints of the indigenist novel beginning to confront what Cornejo Polar terms "the unavoidable aporias of its production" (*Writing in the Air* 116). In other words, it reveals "a certain dissatisfaction with not only literary language but language in general," stemming from the two basic questions of representation and authenticity (116). So, for example, *El mundo*'s narrator admits to the difficulty and ambiguity of

finding an adequate form of address for the wise mayor of Rumi (Rosendo), because “algo de su poderosa personalidad no es abarcada por tales señas” (385; ch. I).

Yet, we must beware imposing strict divisions between orality and writing, or locating them as binaries that have no meeting ground. Even as we emphasize the orality of both Mundari and the Spanish (and/or Quechua) spoken by Rumi and/or other Andean indigenous groups, we should remember that new developments have been, and are, continually taking place. This implies that while this comparative framework is relevant in certain ways, it would also suffer from some limitations brought on by the passage of time. Both books note linguistic change: just as the *comunidad* in *El mundo* has been speaking Spanish (not Quechua) for generations, similarly the Mundari-speakers in *Chotti Munda* do not speak a pure Mundari language. Devi’s Bengali has a generous smattering of English words within the speech of the Mundas and others, through which she inscribes this *adivasi group* into modernity; they do not inhabit a bubble untouched by the colonial/postcolonial state and its systems of control. This is a feature that Spivak retains in her translation by marking their utterance differently.

A news article from late 2019 reports on a doctoral student in Peru becoming the first “in the [San Marcos] university’s 468-year history [to have] written and defended a thesis [...] entirely in the native language [Quechua].” The student in question, Roxana Quispe Collantes, notes: “Quechua doesn’t lack the vocabulary for an academic language. Today many people mix the language with Spanish” (Collyns). Her observation serves as a reminder that indigenous languages are also constantly evolving and have the ability to adapt to new contexts, including what have traditionally been writing-centric arenas such as academia.

In India, *adivasi* writers are becoming more visible. *Adivasi* writer Vahru Sonvane’s poem “Stage,” cited by Ramnika Gupta, sums up the need and space for *adivasi* writing, for

representing themselves instead of being spoken about or spoken for: “We did not go up the stage/ That was made in our name/ Nor were we invited on to it/ [...] And ‘they,’ standing on the stage/ Kept telling us of our own misery/ But our misery remained ours alone/ it was never theirs” (20). There has also been activity in developing scripts for *adivasi* languages.[34] Nishaant Choksi notes the nearly sacrosanct relationship between India’s *adivasi* communities and oral traditions, yet he adds that “the assertion of orality as the primary feature of Adivasi expressive life has the unintended consequence […] of displacing Adivasi practices onto the realm of ‘pure culture’”; citing Prathama Banerjee, he claims that such an approach runs the risk of “rendering these practices ‘resistant to interpretative use by historians and, in turn, preventing the adequate political mobilization of such practices’” (92). Choksi argues that the focus on orality as the dominant framework for describing and analyzing *adivasi* expressive life overlooks the long exposure to different literacy traditions, especially in the early twentieth century, “when members of eastern India’s several Austro-Asiatic speaking communities engaged in a conscious process of creating scripts”; an analysis of these script systems, he says, reveals the political and social history of writing and literacy contact that characterized late colonial and early pre-colonial India (93). This is another reminder that denying such communities’ connections with writing is as unhelpful as overlooking their distance from writing systems.

These novels represent indigenous and *adivasi* culture as fluid and varied, through the negotiation between tradition and modernity, as seen in the shift from Rosendo to Benito in *El mundo*, and from Dhani to Chotti in *Chotti Munda*. Again, this works against the notion that indigenous communities are trapped in a “timeless” elsewhere. In staging the move from Rosendo to Benito, and Dhani to Chotti, *and* showing the alterations that accompany these shifts, the novels convey a sense of these communities’ active response to external change. In *Chotti*

[34] One commonly cited example is the invention of a script called *Olchiki* by Santali speakers.

Munda, a further shift is visible between Chotti and subsequent generations. Chotti reflects on the changing times and attitudes of Mundayouth, but it is mainly with a sense of acceptance that he tells his wife: "their thinkin's diff'ren. Let 'em think their own thoughts" (111; ch. 8).

Chapter three turned from the past and the present to look towards the future, the projects of hope that are common to the two books. We found that each book brings to the fore the project for a purposeful education, one that is alive to the communities' real needs. This education is purposeful in that it is geared towards bringing positive change, towards redressing inequalities and injustice. The "schooling" of these communities, their awakening to a consciousness of their situation, which leads them to a desire for real positive change, is tied to the practice of forging links and alliances. These alliances, based on shared values and attitudes, cut across divisions of class, caste, race, gender, and nationality, both within the narratives and in the wider work that each narrative seeks to achieve with its readers in the public sphere. The novels laud such alliances, and seek to open space for real *solidarities. El mundo* sketches a panoramic view of Peru, indicating the threads that link people throughout the nation, whether in the rural margins or the city. *Chotti Munda* displays more small-scale, local and rooted solidarities, but even these contain the seeds to grow into movements of greater scope and scale.

At the same time, both books emphasize that some alliances are more productive than others in the long run. I refer to the impulse to identify common ground with other oppressed groups: for instance, the realisation of the poverty and exploitation of non-Andean indigenous groups (of the Amazon) in *El mundo;* in *Chotti Munda*, the *adivasis* and Hindu outcastes come together over their similar struggles. The Peruvian novel's imagined solidarities ("imagined" because it is primarily the readers, and not the characters, who are able to engage with this idea more fully) can be seen as playing out in the real world, with increasing visibility. One example

is provided by Shane Greene, who notes the assumption that "the historical dynamic between the Andean highlands, representing Inca tradition and the contemporary indigenous peasantry, and the urban coast, representing a modernised (that is, Europeanised) space, explain all that is of 'national' importance" (330). For Green, this "bi-regional dynamic" has obscured "the Amazon as a site of historical events and eco-ethnopolitics of national and global scope," but he goes on to argue that recent debates on indigenous issues reveal how "the Amazonians' longer engagement in the global sphere of indigenous and environmental politics now places them in the position of exemplifying indigeneity for the Andeans and Peruvians at large" (327). Thus, *El mundo*'s imagination of an Andean-Amazonian solidarity, in some ways, anticipates the eco-ethnic alliances that Green highlights.

The final chapter of the thesis, then, is central to locating the relevance of this comparative study to our time. It consolidates a review of these older works in a way that resonates with current debates, realities,and the renewed interest in subaltern agency.

2. Omissions

I should acknowledge at least one significant thematic omission within the larger topic of subaltern resistance in this thesis: women. This is an area which not only merits attention for itself, but would enhance (improve, and even alter) this initial exploratory project. In his account of Spivak's deconstruction of Subalternist historiography, Vinayak Chaturvedi outlines how she "issued the most trenchant internal critique of the project's conceptualization of the subaltern: namely, the failure to conceptualize the subjectivity of the subaltern woman" (38). While pointing out that the group is scrupulous in its consideration towards women, Spivak observes that "they overlook how important the concept-metaphor woman is to the functioning of their discourse" ("Deconstructing"26). Such criticism could apply to my own work as well. Yet, not

wanting to compartmentalise women as just "one more theme" to be studied, I could not have done justice to the quality of attention this aspect requires, for reasons of time. I hope others may feel motivated to take up the task of exploring the question of gender in these texts.

As a step towards that future project, I note that Alegría's novel includes certain deeply disturbing moments in terms of the representation of women.[35] It is true that, overall, the depiction of women by Alegría seems sympathetic, as seen in characters like Maibí (the Amazonian woman who becomes Augusto's companion), Casiana (a "new" member of Rumi), and so on. Yet women also cause the novel trouble. It is symptomatic, considering the text's more or less binary depiction of right and wrong, that one of the two significant sources of ambiguity (the other is Fiero Vásquez, the bandit) is a woman, who seems to be in neither Rosendo nor Amenábar's camps. I refer here to NashaSuro, Rumi's healer: "la fama la señalaba curandera. La leyenda, bruja fina" (557; ch. VII). Her portrayal alternates between healer and witch, and an air of mystery surrounds her throughout. Her powers and prophecies are always suspect, including to the wisest in Rumi. Yet the narrative is not quite able to fix her, making it difficult to write her off completely.

Another problematic area in *El mundo* is the treatment of rape. Women's bodies are frequently a site of violence in the novel, with rape a recurring theme. The War of the Pacific is shown to have left its mark particularly on the women of Rumi, in the form of sexual violence, children fathered by passing soldiers, and the ensuing stigma incarnated above all in the stepson, Benito, who is forced to leave the community. However, the sensitivity shown towards the trauma and suffering of these women is missing from the rape of Rosa Estela, daughter of the *gobernador* Zenobio; the latter is among the people who betray Rumi and help Amenábar win

[35] I use the word "moments" with reference to one of Spivak's statements on how she reads: "That is the way I read as a literary critic. I look at the 'marginal' moment that unravels the text; paradoxically, it gives us a sense of what is 'normal' for the text, what norms the text" ("In Response" 229).

the case against the *comunidad*. In revenge, a group of *comuneros*-turned-bandits ransack his house and business, and rape his daughter. While the scene is not described in graphic detail, the absence of empathy for this character, or even a sense of disapproval, is unsettling.

Devi's book, too, does not quite escape the marginal moment altogether. I refer to an instance that betrays a worrisome view of "otherness" in relation to the "other" other, i.e. the non-Munda tribal from outside India, in what is otherwise a sensitive novel. It is difficult to say much about the matter, since this is just one sentence that one may easily miss in passing. Yet this passing reference triggers a doubt in my mind, a doubt that remains although without continually calling attention to itself. I refer to the circumstances of the death of the sympathetic Englishman artist, Hugh Ronaldson, who had befriended Chotti. Against the wishes of his elder brother (a colonial official), Hugh publishes a book that features images of the "dubious" figures of Dhani and Chotti. However, the narrator notes—with characteristic irony—that "there is no time to make a row about this, for Hugh fulfils God's wish and brings relief to his brother by *dying from an angry villager's spearthrust as he tries to draw pictures of adivasis in Uganda*" (54; ch. 4; emphasis mine). This one short sentence floods the mind with images so often circulated in popular media, of "savage" tribal peoples. Its effect is jarring especially as it contrasts so profoundly with the Mundas' amicable (if cautious) treatment of Ronaldson, and the narrative's painstaking efforts towards a humane depiction of the *adivasis*. Is Devi unwittingly constructing Ugandan "*adivasis*" in an unflattering light? It is tough to argue one way or the other in the absence of further clues, but perhaps it is this very lack of further context that makes this brief reference disconcerting.

Returning to the theme of women, and to conclude on a more optimistic note: although I have not dwelt on the figures of subaltern women in the two novels, I have found that in the real

world, it is women who have frequently been the driving force in bringing these communities into the limelight. Besides the fact that *Chotti Munda is* written by a woman, and translated by another, we cannot fail to notice how often it is women who have shown the way in this context, on both sides of the Pacific, whether in literature, theory, sociology, or activism. As Núria Vilanova observes, in her overview of women's writing in the Andes, "charged with the political, social, and cultural matters ingrained in their societies, women's writing has historically risen with voices that captured those of the oppressed and silenced" (364). The writings of Mahasweta Devi, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Arundhati Roy, Ramnika Gupta, and many others, are inextricably aligned with the struggles of these subaltern groups in India. And in Peru, lest we forget, it is Clorinda Matto de Turner whose novel *Aves sin nido* is a turning-point, as the precursor of the indigenist novel which launched the struggles of these groups into the mainstream imaginary, leading the way for emergence of future indigenist work such as that of Ciro Alegría. In Latin America at large, Rosario Castellanos (Mexico), Gioconda Belli (Nicaragua) are some other names whose work resonates with such issues, while Indigenous women such as Domitila Barrios de Chungara (Bolivia) and Rigoberta Menchú (Guatemala) have left a lasting mark with their activism and *testimonios,* which, in turn, were transcribed by women.

3. Final Words

The overall theme I have hoped to emphasize is that of solidarity. A south-south dialogue necessitates that we seek links between South Asia and Latin America. The *adivasi* and indigenous contexts offer just one among many other possibilities of subaltern solidarity and affirmative action. Both regions could learn much from each other's experiences, thinkers and activists, and channel this learning towards effective action in the present. My point of departure

in this thesis was the Andean indigenous groups' and Indian *adivasi* groups' common condition of subalternity, as theorised by the South Asian Subalternist collective, and taken up by Latin Americanists. But recently, thought from Latin America is stimulating great interest in South Asian intellectual circles too. One example that could be specially relevant here is that of Mariátegui.There is a wave of interest in this Peruvian thinker worldwide, and translations of his work are opening new doors, including for thinking the situation in India. An Indian reviewer, commenting on an anthology of Mariátegui's writings (in English translation), calls it "a timely venture," and draws a series of comparisons between the thought of this landmark Peruvian thinker and the socioeconomic and political trajectory of India (Banerjee 26). With reference to the question of land and the indigenous population of 1920s Peru, he asks: "Do we not find shades of this trend in what is happening to the *adivasis* and other downtrodden communities in the Indian countryside today?" (26). Similarly,in the failure of the *Sendero Luminoso*[36] movement in 1990s Peru, he finds "anticipatory echoes of the present plight of the Maoist movement in India" (28), besides shades of Peruvian *rondas campesinas* in the vigilante groups[37] created by the Indian state to counter the guerillas.

For me, this study has not only been an opportunity to further my understanding in Latin American studies, but also given me a broader perspective on many aspects of life back home in India. I can look back and see how far this journey has helped my thought to evolve from where it stood over a year ago. In this sense, while I consider myself the biggest beneficiary of this thesis, I hope it indicates scope for further, more profound interactions between literature from

[36]*Sendero Luminoso* (or Shining Path) was a far-left communist party in Peru, founded in the late 1960s but which made its presence felt from 1980. Expounding militant Maoist doctrine, it aimed to overthrow the state by guerrilla warfare and replace it with revolutionary communist peasant rule. The group became notorious for its violent brutality during the 1980s, but went into decline following the capture of its leader Abimael Guzmán in 1992.

[37] Such vigilante groups include the *Ranvir Sena* and *Salwa Judum* in the states of Bihar, and Chhattisgarh, respectively.

these two postcolonial regions, and that, even in a small way, this thesis has been a step towards further south-south dialogue, and the forging of new trans-regional solidarities relevant to the current world.

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