

GANDHI MARG

VOLUME 44 • NUMBER 3 • OCTOBER–DECEMBER 2022

Gandhi Peace Foundation
New Delhi



Gandhi Marg Quarterly

44(3): 263–280

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<http://gandhimargjournal.org/>

ISSN 0016–4437

Can Cuban Society Learn from the Gandhi-Kumarappa Economic Framework?

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ABSTRACT

Foes of the Communist regime in Cuba hoped, mistakenly, that the July 11th, 2021, protests would turn out to be a ‘Cuban Spring’. A year later is a suitable time to review the government’s resilience over the years in handling various crises that threatened its fall. This article offers an account of present-day Cuba and some reflections based on a recent three-week visit there. I argue that the government should foster more cooperatives, promote decentralization, and thus incorporate relevant aspects of a Gandhi-Kumarappa framework to a sustainable economy under 21st-century conditions.

Key words: Cuba, 1994 uprising, Gandhi-Kumarappa economic framework, solidarity economy, digitalisation

Introduction

DURING THE 2010-11 ‘Arab Spring’, when a series of pro-democracy and anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions were taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, the Western media were rife with reports of a possibility of creating a ‘Cuban Spring’ to destabilize the Communist regime there¹. One idea apropos was that ‘technology, and especially social media, could ignite a revolution’², long-time critics of Cuba were toying with the idea that the USA could provoke a revolution there with the help of communications technology. Such an impulse has been part of the USA’s attitude toward Cuba for decades³. The notion that ‘the anti-government dissidents [in Cuba] will use the internet, cell phones,

October–December 2022

and social media to foment a popular uprising on the island, modelled after the “Arab Spring” was predicated on ‘a particular understanding of Cuba that portrays an imminent collapse of the Cuban experiment’. The notion was based on fallacious assumptions about Cuba.

Two Cuban Julys

July is a politically special month for Cuba⁴. It was on July 26th, 1953, that *El Comandante* Fidel Castro⁵ launched a historic attack⁶ on the Moncada Military Barracks in Santiago de Cuba, to overthrow the government of USA-backed dictator Fulgenico Batista⁷.

The July 2021 protests began in San Antonio de los Baños, a town on the outskirts of Havana hit by hour-long daily power cuts for a while. Shortage of basic amenities, including food and medicine, and a surge of Covid-19 infections (amidst a notably slow vaccine roll-out) were other facts prompting Cubans to take to the streets to express their concerns and raise their demands. News of the protests spread like wildfire as images (including videos) and write-ups were all over social networking sites, including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. Within hours the protests spread across the island, from Holguin, Santa Clara, Matanzas, and Camaguey to Guantanamo and Santiago de Cuba. Protesters looted shops and walked off with washing machines, mattresses, and bottles of rum. Video footage from Havana showed young men striding through streets, clutching rocks and throwing them at police patrol cars⁸. Images on social media showed the security forces detaining, beating, and pepper-spraying some of the protesters⁹. More than 300 people have been sentenced to lengthy jail terms (6 to 30 years) for taking part in the protest¹⁰. It is notable that artists¹¹, musicians, writers, performers, and academics who are part of a Cuban art-collective called ‘the *San Isidro* movement’ played a significant role in the protests. Such collectives have been campaigning for greater freedom under the Communist government in Cuba¹².

The 1994 Uprising

The closest Cuba ever came to something like an ‘Arab Spring’ was in 1994 during a ‘special period’¹³. On August 5th of that year, there was an uprising in Havana’s Malecon district (in retrospect, the uprising is called ‘the Maleconazo’); a riot took place, and several attempts by residents to flee Cuba by sea were thwarted violently by the local authorities. When Castro came to know about it, he rushed to Malecon, the rioters fell silent upon seeing him, and he gave on that same night a televised address to the nation and announced that any Cuban who wanted to leave the island nation could do so. Around

35,000 people left Cuba in improvised boats and rafts and sailed to Miami. It was an embarrassing episode of Castro's regime¹⁴, but it led to a significant number of 'troublesome malcontents' leaving the island¹⁵. Discontent over frequent blackouts, shortage of food and medicines, poor water supply, curbs imposed on freedom of expression, and a stagnant economy triggered the protests in 1994. Those reasons were similar to most of the reasons for the unrest in 2021, but the Covid-19 pandemic aggravated the problems in 2021, and another major difference is that the 1994 incident took place in the pre-internet age when demonstrations were easier to contain. The economic situation in recent years in Cuba has been less dire than in 1994, but the 2021 protests were bigger and more threatening to the Communist regime. The prevalence of social media in 2021 and how the pandemic exacerbated economic problems were salient new factors.

Communist regimes in several parts of the world¹⁶ have been known to use cold-blooded murders in order to crush dissent, but the Cuban government did not resort to such gruesome practices to handle the July 11th, 2021 protests; instead, the Communists in Cuba showed a modicum of governmental maturity by avoiding violent suppression.

Covid-19 in Cuba

Cuba's first known Covid-19 case was confirmed in mid-March 2020. Already before then, the government had come up with a "Plan for Prevention and Control"; it included¹⁷ healthcare-worker training, expansion of laboratory infrastructure and facilities for molecular-level diagnosis of Covid-19 infections, reinforcement of the National Program of the Surveillance of Acute Respiratory Infections, widespread testing of civilians and contact-tracing, and enforcement of rules for wearing masks in public places and likewise for social distancing. This scheme worked well for several months, and Cuba was praised internationally for bringing the pandemic under control better than many other countries. As of March 22nd, 2020, only 40 people in Cuba were known to have Covid-19, and they were all hospitalized and treated, whereas people suspected of having contracted the disease were immediately isolated for 14 days and underwent molecular diagnostics. However, by August of that year, Cuba had 2,726 known cases, 88 of which had been fatal, and although this rate of public-health damage was relatively low compared to the rates in richer countries¹⁸, the pandemic continued to persist and Cuba had, by December, more than eleven thousand cases, 140 of which had proven fatal. Subsequent research suggests that because the Cuban

October–December 2022

government had meanwhile sent a considerable number of doctors on missions abroad, doctors within Cuba who did not have enough specialized training in dealing with the disease were called upon to treat Cubans who needed specialized treatment¹⁹, and hospitals' facilities became overloaded. Thus, a combination of overly optimistic governmental emphasis on medical diplomacy at the expense of domestic healthcare, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, unexpectedly tight financial restrictions and administrative difficulties with regard to importing medicines and administering the nation's clinics undermined its brave initial pandemic response²⁰. The social consequences were aggravated by broader economic factors, i.e., widespread poverty and insufficient opportunities for gainful employment. (The tourism sector in Cuba suffered greatly owing to the pandemic. The economy shrank monetarily by more than ten percent.)

Cuba's Covid-19 Vaccines

Cuba's prestigious biotech sector has, notwithstanding these precarious socio-economic conditions, devised five kinds of Covid-19 vaccine, three of which ("Soberana 2", "Soberana Plus" and "Abdala") have been authorized by the Cuban authorities for use and export. The other two (one of which is a nasal spray) are still in clinical trials²¹. It has been reported that Cuba has also started vaccinating children as young as two years old against Covid-19, and that in Phase I and Phase II trials of Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus vaccine in 350 children aged between three and 18 years old, no serious adverse effects were found (Augustin, 2022)²². Although neither the World Health Organization nor any other major international regulators have authorized the use of these vaccines, the fact remains that Cuba has vaccinated a greater percentage of its population against Covid-19 than the highly developed countries have done, and the government claims that 90% of the citizens who have been given three doses of the government-approved vaccines have been free of symptomatic Covid illness²³. It is a matter of self-esteem and pride for everyone in Cuba that the nation was, despite all its economic adversities, able to devise, produce and benefit from effective Covid vaccines.

The US Blockade

Cuba has been under a US embargo for more than 60 years. Relations between the two countries began to be tested in 1959 when Castro overthrew a US-backed puppet regime in Havana and established a socialist state. The US government at that time, under President Eisenhower extended formal recognition to the new Cuban government

and welcomed Castro for a visit to the USA, but then his cultivation of links with the USSR, his nationalization of American-owned properties in Cuba, and his hiking of customs duties on imports from the USA disappointed the government in Washington, and so it began to retaliate with economic penalties (e.g. slashing the rate of imports of Cuban sugar) and to have the CIA plan an invasion of Cuba by Cuban emigrants residing in Florida and equipped with US military gear for the undertaking. As soon as John Kennedy became president (in 1961) this ill-informed plan was implemented and the failed aggression caused further deterioration of relations between the two countries²⁴ entailing a US embargo on imports from Cuba and travel restrictions rendering it virtually impossible for US citizens to visit Cuba. Years later, in 2014, US President Barack Obama took some extraordinary steps to normalize US relations with Cuba by meeting with the then Cuban President Raul Castro and restoring full diplomatic ties²⁵. It is noteworthy that Pope Francis and the Vatican played an instrumental role in US-Cuba negotiations at that time²⁶. Some 50% of Cuba's citizens are (according to Pew Research Centre) still today are members of the Roman Catholic Church. This is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that the Vatican has gradually stepped up its relations with Cuba in the last two decades: Pope John Paul II became in 1998 the first Pope to visit there, and Pope Benedict XVI visited in 2012 and not only presided at an outdoor mass but also urged Cubans to build an 'open' society reflecting the goodness of God and worthy of Humanity at its best²⁷. Pope Francis visited in 2015. But then the Trump administration reclassified Cuba as a 'state sponsor of terrorism' and restored a slew of tough sanctions. The Biden Administration has eased some of them, but the recent anti-regime protests in both countries and the worsening human conditions in the USA will further complicate peace-making between the USA and Cuba as well as elsewhere in the world.

The Blockade's Economic Impact

The economic warfare that the USA has perpetrated against Cuba since the early 1960s has been a major cause of the problems plaguing the country. She survived the Cold-War years with the help of the USSR and its allies in Eastern Europe, but since 1991, she has faced isolation from all frontiers. The blockade has crippled her economy in such a way that ordinary Cubans have suffered from perpetual short-ages of many rudimentary necessities. Not only has the blockade impacted health care by forbidding the import into Cuba of medical technology with US components, but also the USA has banned all dollar remittances to millions of Cuban families that rely on monetary

October–December 2022

assistance from abroad. The United Nations General Assembly has for years called for an end to the indecently inhumane blockade, but only during Obama's presidency did the demand have a palpable impact. The UN estimates that the embargo has cost Cuba an equivalent of more than \$130bn in monetary damages — and those costs to Cuba have been compounded by the penalties imposed by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) on Cuba's allies and investors²⁸. Between April 2019 and March 2020 alone, OFAC penalties amounting to nearly \$2½ billion targeted banks, insurance firms, energy companies, and travel agencies²⁹.

Can Social Solidarity Economy and Cooperatives Save Cuba Now?

I am deeply interested in this possibility. The term 'Social Solidarity Economy' (SSE) means production and exchange of goods and services by enterprises and other organizations pursuing beneficial social and environmental objectives. In Cuba, such economic activity has been promoted top-down ever since 1959 when Castro came into power, and the national government has most often sponsored economic undertakings³⁰. Although this approach has yielded good results in terms of developing 'human capital', Cuba's dependence on sugar exports for foreign exchange was affected by the collapse in the 1990s of the USSR (which was buying Cuban sugar at a generously high price). This prompted her to try to become self-reliant in overall agricultural production. The effort included experiments with urban organic farming and 'organoponics'³¹. Cuba has, in recent years, tried to develop an altogether more sustainable form of socialism³². Experiments in local SSE in the form of strengthening cooperatives have been part of this effort. The agricultural transformations in Cuba in the 1990s can be assessed from an SSE perspective, and some researchers say that SSE in the Cuban context nowadays is bound to be a matter of a "potential union of three spheres – public, enterprise and private – comprised of a variety of economic actors – state, associative and [individually] autonomous – that adopts, as part of their economic process of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, the principles of responsibility towards society and the environment"³³.

Self-managing cooperatives are now being promoted as instruments for the transition of Cuba towards a sustainable socialism in tune with 21st-century conditions³⁴. Co-operatives in Cuba are as old as its socialist system; they were initially limited to the agricultural sector, but later on, non-agricultural sectors were also included, and after Raul Castro became President in 2008, a slew of economic reforms was launched in which the national government also devolved a certain

amount of economic planning and control to municipalities, and the role of local cooperatives in transforming the entire Cuban economy was stressed. “These [reforms] began with the transfer of some state-owned enterprises to workers who were organised into cooperatives basically holding the enterprise and its equipment as usufruct on favourable terms – rent-free and with state subsidies and tax concessions”³⁵.

Although there have been criticisms that the Cuban government has been slow and cautious about approving new cooperatives, some 450 flourished between 2008 and 2013. They included restaurants³⁶, cafés, construction firms, manufacturers of clothing, furniture, and other goods, bus companies and car washes, recycling operations, body shops, computing and accounting services, beauty salons, and night clubs³⁷. It has been noted, however, that “the project of downsizing the state [in Cuba] has its limits in that the state’s role will continue to be critical in providing legal and institutional framework as well as oversight for the new co-ops and other new institutions”.

In my opinion, the urban transport system could be rejuvenated with the help of SSE networks and cooperatives. Poultry farming, piggery, courtyard farming, and kitchen gardening could be promoted with the help of cooperatives. Cuba could address the consumable-energy crunch by embracing renewable-energy techniques including the production, supply and installation of solar panels in homes, and this could be done in an SSE way; likewise, with regard to the shortage of drinking water, it could be mitigated by desalination units.³⁸ Cooperatives could serve as a helping hand to many who are in search of decent jobs. It has been observed that communities having strong local social solidarity can overcome or minimise the adverse effects of the pandemic³⁹. Cubans should see cooperatives as a form of SSE enabling economic development to remain people-centered.

Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

One way the government strives for national economic self-sufficiency is by encouraging the development of micro, small and medium-sized commercial enterprises (MSMEs). It has been reported that as of September 2021, a total of 35 of them were functioning in Cuba (Molina and Cabrera, 2021)⁴⁰. Among the first businesses to have been promoted as MSMEs in Cuba were (1) SERVIMAV, a Green Areas Maintenance Service in the province of Cienfuegos, and (2) Santa-Clara-based Bromey srl⁴¹, a business producing more than 30 edible products, including peanut bars and *turrones* (a Spanish kind of almond candy) as well as cereals.

Scope for Governmental Decentralization

Cuba is comprised of 16 provinces and 168 municipalities⁴². Havana's big capital city has had since 2008 its own kind of local government comprised of 19 mini-municipalities. Literature discussing local government and decentralization in Cuba is rare, and some of it may have been misunderstood due to the widespread perception of the Cuban national government as a hard-line Communist one⁴³. Even though the framework for local government in a national Communist regime cannot be the same as under a liberal constitution, there is still a modicum of possibilities for active civic participation in local government in Cuba. The Party certainly influences, and that too with a sometimes-heavy hand, the actions of local governments, and it controls media outlets and the citizens' access to the internet⁴⁴. Yet decentralization and local cooperatives have huge potential to benefit the nation⁴⁵.

Digitalization

Cuba is normally portrayed as being struck in 'digital dark ages' with limited access to computers, smart-phones, and the internet, and with internet censorship imposed by the government. This is ironic since architects of the Cuban revolution had entertained positive feelings about electronic technologies. In 1963, Commander Ernesto Che Guevara, who was at that time the Minister of Industries, declared "computing and electronics [to be] strategical for the development of the country"⁴⁶; Fidel Castro founded in 1969 a Digital Research Centre for creating the first Cuban computer, and a year later the first Cuban mini-computer (CID-201) was created⁴⁷. It was not until the 21st century, however, that the Cuban government launched a "Program for the Computerisation of Cuban Society". It envisaged an intensive and orderly use of ICTs and an integration of several Cuban computer networks. It was mostly a matter of private networks overseen at the ministerial level and of a broad 'Cuba Network' facilitating secure, massive, and organized access to information at the national level⁴⁸. According to the 2007 National Statistics Office report, Cuba had nearly 1.25 million telephone lines in the country (there are 11.2 million citizens), of which more than 900,000 were residential and the rest were in state hands; some 330,000 mobile phones were found to be in use; but the number of personal computers amounted to hardly one half of one percent of the number of citizens, and those computers were mostly in government offices, schools or health facilities. According to reports in Western media publications, Cuba was "basically offline" until 2008. After Raul Castro became in that year

the nation's president, the sale of computers and cell phones was legalized, and Cuba began to embark on a digital revolution⁴⁹. By 2014, it was reported that some 27% of citizens had access to the Web, albeit mainly through a government-controlled internet at their workplaces. In 2018, Cubans got access to mobile internet for the first time via data plans. As per various reports that have appeared in the media, more than seven million Cubans (i.e. nearly two-thirds of the citizens) had access to the internet by the end of 2019, nearly half of them were mobile-data customers, and more than 650,000 of them had 4G service of some kind⁵⁰. Electronic technology has thus started to reach all walks of life in Cuba⁵¹. Two examples of museums making use of it to narrate history to their visitors are the 'Ernesto Che Guevara Sculpture Complex' in Santa Clara (which houses also his mausoleum)⁵² and the Fidel Castro Ruz Study Center⁵³, an institution dedicated to the study and dissemination of his thought and work.

Conclusions

The time is ripe for Cuba to embrace, full-scale, an innovative 21st-century kind of 'sustainable socialism' with gradually more and more local cooperatives. The regime has already understood the relevance of 'sustainable socialism', and its experiments in co-operativism and localized SSE are evidence of a latent readiness to proceed further in this direction. The national government has been making serious attempts ever since 2008 to re-structure the old Cuban economic model by strengthening state-owned enterprises in certain key sectors and by probing decentralization and transferring a hefty number of formerly public-sector jobs to the private sector⁵⁴. Cooperatives and other kinds of SSE enterprises have become such an integral part of the Cuban socialist model that the extent to which they ought to be free of control by the central government warrants discussion as there are some worries that the nation is evolving toward "deconstruction of its social and solidarity economy"⁵⁵. Cuba's institutions of higher learning and socio-economic research should carefully examine various experiments and models of SSE across the world and come up with recommendations for putting them into practice under 21st-century conditions. With the help of cooperatives and solidarity economy framework, Cuba could, I believe, address effectively a broad range of forthcoming economic, social, demographic, and environmental problems. Vibrant local government can be superbly beneficial, and local cooperatives can harbour social equality by complementing the redistributive policies of the state. It has been observed that co-operatives do generally play a significant role in maximising welfare⁵⁶. For instance, AMUL in India and Desjardins in Canada are successful

cooperative organizations in their respective countries, and “social solidarity enterprises make up a significant part of the plural economies in places such as Quebec in Canada and Kerala, a state in India”⁵⁷.

In addressing her persistent problem of insufficient gainful-employment opportunities, Cuba should develop decentralized economic ‘niche structures’ conceived in a framework of comprehensive cooperation with collective self-organization and ownership whereby capital (in moderate amounts) and labour can function harmoniously together. “Construction of niche structures is development of collective enterprises at the decentralised level with small capital base in all fields of activities including manufacturing, repairing, process- ing, trading, marketing, services including education, health and others”⁵⁸. Though some amount of monetary capital may be required at each stage of development of the niche, the workers would bear the primary responsibility to create and manage the co-operative and thereby gain a modicum of socio-economic empowerment⁵⁹.

Cubans should also deliberately retain a wise degree of economic austerity in their culture. Certain aspects of Gandhian- style *swaraj* (self-discipline) could be adapted. Mahatma Gandhi was of the opinion that the planet “Earth provides enough to satisfy every man’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.”⁶⁰ According to J C Kumarappa, a highly trained economist who was a close associate of the Mahatma, “What the Gandhian Economy aims at is to furnish all our people with their full requirement of food, clothing, hygiene, etc. These are our primary needs and it is not beyond our capacity to meet them if we will only concentrate our efforts in this direction. Over and above these, if we aspire for luxuries and indulgences, man’s life becomes wasted in the effort to acquire such things”⁶¹. Gandhi and Kumarappa envisaged a non-violent socio-economic order promoting equity and ecological balance, and they said that “the only path to true democracy in political life, and to peace among nations” would be a decentralised economic and political system whereby economic “rewards” would be “moderate”. The theoretical Gandhi- Kumarappa economic framework was devised for the sake of a long- term-sustainable economy in the Republic of India, based on values of cooperation, democratic participation, mutual aid, and social inclusion. Various details of the scheme would be inapplicable in Cuba, but the wise precept of decent voluntary austerity could be cherished in Cuba even though Emile Durkheim’s concept of a sociological order arising from the shared beliefs, values, norms, and practices of a given group of people⁶² differs saliently from the Marxist theory of social order based

on economic structure and class relations involved in the production of goods. The Cuba Family Code 2022 has the potential to usher in a democracy within Cuban families and this spirit of democracy will eventually have a considerable impact on the political dynamics and power structures within the country⁶³. From now on the Family Code in Cuba and its functioning should be clearly studied and documented to formulate new indicators that determine the level of democracy and freedom even in Communist/Socialist regimes⁶⁴.

Acknowledgment: An earlier version of this article was published in *Mainstream* weekly. I thank Mark Lindley for his invaluable assistance in putting together this version.

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2. Lana Wylie, and Lisa Glidden, "The Cuban Spring' Fallacy: The Current Incarnation of a Persistent Narrative", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 5,2, (2013), p.140–167.
3. Jules R Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of Cuban Revolution*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
4. According to Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Cuba has been a communist regime for more than six decades. As on 2020, it has a population of about 11 million (11,305,532) people who primarily speak Spanish. Cuba has an area of 110,860 square kilometres and is about the size of Pennsylvania state in USA. Cuba has a GDP of \$100 billion. Its per capita GDP is roughly \$8,000 (CFR, 2020). Despite the fragile and fractured economy, Cuba's remarkable achievements in Human Development (HDI) needs to be appreciated. Cuba's HDI value for 2021 is 0.764— which put the country in the high human development category— positioning it at 83 out of 191 countries and territories. Also see United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021). *The Next Frontier: Human Development and the Anthropocene*. UNDP. On the other hand, Cuba is classified as an authoritarian regime in the 2021 Democracy Index with a dismal score of 2.65 However, Cuba's score of 2.65 is better than that of China, also classified as an authoritarian regime with a score of 1.94. See, 2022 Democracy Index. *Democracy Index 2022: The China Challenge*. Economic Intelligence Unit (EIU).
5. A Cuban revolutionary and politician who was the leader of Cuba from 1959 to 2008, serving as the prime minister of Cuba from 1959 to 1976 and president from 1976 to 2008. Ideologically a Marxist–Leninist and Cuban nationalist, he also served as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba from 1961 until 2011.
6. Although the attacks were unsuccessful, the rebellion marked the

October–December 2022

beginning of the Cuban revolution and laid the foundation for the anti-imperialist movement that eventually defeated Batista's military dictatorship on January 1, 1959. On December 2, 1956, another attempt led by Castro and an Argentinian Marxist Revolutionary Che Guevara took place. Though it failed, Guevara won Castro's confidence and was given the rank of comandante. In the late 1958, Guevara's column derailed an armoured train filled with Batista's troops and took over the city and it played a crucial role in the ultimate victory of Cuban Revolution in 1959. On January 1959, Guevara, along with the Castro brothers, were recognized as one of the three most powerful leaders of the Cuban revolution.

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12. The author met a few college students who participated in the protest and during the conversation they said that some positive changes have been observed in the attitude of the government. The name of the students has been kept anonymous for their privacy. Also see Kirby, 2021. Jen Kirby, "Artists laid the foundation for Cuba's protests. An economy in free fall and the pandemic ignited it". *Vox*, July 15, 2021.
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14. Vegard Bye, *The End of an Era – or a New Start? Economic Reforms with Potential for Political Transformation in Cuba on Raúl Castro's Watch (2008-2018)*, Dr. philos. Dissertation, Series of dissertations submitted to the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oslo No. 726, 2019.
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16. For instance, the Great Purge (the purges of 1936-1938) in the Soviet

Union, a state -organized bloodshed that took place under the Stalin regime. The 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, in which the Communist Regime in China mercilessly killed student protestors, who were demanding democracy, free speech and free press in China, is another example of the crimes committed against humanity by authoritarian regimes.

17. Iyanu Osunmo, *The Impact of Covid-19 on Cuba in 2020*. Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, 2020.
18. On June 22, 2022, the author visited a Family Medical Office in a community in Cuba and had a discussion with the doctors and staff at this health facility regarding how Cuba was successfully able to mitigate the pandemic in the initial phase and the reasons for the sharp rise in Covid cases afterwards. The staff said that the initial success in flattening the Covid -19 infection curve led to premature celebrations and this led to relaxation of stringent preventive measures and it instilled a false sense of security. The author replied that Kerala, a state in India also had a similar experience. Kerala incorporated the test, trace and isolate strategy and flattened the infection curve during the first wave of the pandemic and it led to premature celebrations of Kerala model of Covid-19 management. It instilled a false sense of security in the minds of people and the government and eventually Kerala became a victim of its own success as it failed to contain the spurt of Covid 19 infections after the first half of May 2020. (Chathukulam & Tharamangalam, 2020 and Chathukulam & Joseph, 2022). Jos Chathukulam, and Manasi Joseph, *Management of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Kerala Through the Lens of State Capacity and Clientelism*, WIDER Working Paper 2022/60 Helsinki: UNU-WIDER, 2022. Jos Chathukulam, and Joseph Tharamangalam, "The Kerala model in the time of COVID-19: Rethinking state, society and democracy", *World Development*, 137:105207. (2020). DOI: 10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105207. On June 25, 2022, the author also met with some students at the Latin American School of Medical Sciences and discussed about the Cuban healthcare system and its efficacy in handling the pandemic. They told that polyclinics in Cuba were very much in the forefront to contain the spread of the pandemic at the local level. The names of the persons have been kept anonymous to protect their privacy.
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35. Ibid
36. On June 23, 2022, the author went to a Cuban restaurant named *El Biky*. The *El Biky* is a successful cooperative restaurant in Cuba that started functioning in 2013. It is a non-agricultural cooperative. The

author interacted with the staff working at the *El Biky* and they said that the cooperative venture is hugely popular among the Cubans and the author saw a large number of people coming in groups to the *El Biky* Restaurant (which houses a Cafeteria, Sweet Shop/ Candy Store and a Bar) itself is an evidence for this. One of the faculty members of an academic institution affiliated to a Cuban university said that even academic community working in universities now prefer to work in restaurants like *El Biky*, as restaurant jobs pay well. The author also met an Interpreter, who is also a retired University professor. He opined that restaurant jobs offer good salaries and that's why many prefer a job in this sector even as part-time. All these gives an impression regarding the potential and success of cooperatives in Cuba. The author also got a chance to stay at a Santa Clara based Homestay named *Hotel Casita B & B* and during the stay over there the author felt that Cuba should promote more Homestays in all its provinces and it would give a big boost to tourism industry in the island nation. The author also felt that restaurants like '*El Biky*' is also turning into a 'public sphere' where locals discuss about various issues and share ideas and solutions. The situation is similar to the public sphere that evolved in *Indian Coffee Houses* in India.

37. Marc Frank, and Rosa Tania Valdés, "Cuba looks to cooperatives to slow rise of capitalism", *Reuters*, April 13, 2014.
38. The author met a Cuban Chauffeur working with an institute in Cuba. He has a professional degree in Aviation Security Systems from a Russian University. When he returned to Cuba after completing his studies from Russia, he found it very difficult to find a job that meets both his professional and salary expectations. As a result, he was forced to take up the present job to make ends meet.
39. A M Jose, and Jos Chathukulam, "New Cooperative Ministry in India: An Analysis of the Implied Strategy of Development for the Consideration of Policy Makers in India". *Mainstream Weekly*, LX 30, (2022).
40. Julio Martínez Molina, and Ángel Freddy Pérez Cabrera, "Bormey srl among the first 35 newly constituted Medium Size Enterprises in Cuba, Exported 5,000 Peanut Bars to Italy", *Granma*, October 25, 2021.
41. On June 20, 2022, the author visited *Bormey srl*, an MSME in Cuba. *Bormey srl's* products are popular not only in Cuba but also abroad too and it has been reported that they exported 5,000 bars of peanuts to Italy in the first year itself. The products of *Bormey srl* also have a following in United States, Canada and Germany (Molina and Cabrera, 2021). Meanwhile, the author observed that the profit margin is very thin due to various government restrictions within Cuba especially relating to exports, availability of raw materials and lack of advanced technical equipment.
42. United Cities and Local Governments. (2008). Decentralization and

- Local Democracy in the World, Washington, DC: United Cities and Local Government and the World Bank.
43. John Greenwood, and George Lambie, "Local government in Cuba: Democracy through participation?", *Local Government Studies*, 25,1, (1999), p.55-74, DOI: 10.1080/03003939908433937.
 44. 2012 Human Rights Watch World Report 2012: Cuba. Human Rights Watch, New York, United States.
 45. On June 25, 2022, the author met a Professor at University of Havana. He said that cooperatives and decentralization still hold great potential in Cuba and can play a catalytic role in reviving the Cuban economy and in reshaping its growth trajectory. The author also got the opportunity to interact with another Professor at Latin American School of Social Sciences affiliated to University of Havana. The Professor said that Universities and Municipalities in Cuba are coming up with joint collaborative initiatives to foster decentralization and strengthen local governments in Cuba. The Professor added that though the Central government gave some funds to municipalities, only 14 per cent of the funds were utilized by them. The local governments in Cuba lack autonomy and freedom to function as they are still under the control of the Central Government in Cuba. The name of Professors has been kept anonymous to protect their privacy.
 46. The author visited the memorial and mausoleum on June 19, 2022 and saw the revolutionary life and times of Che and other martyrs.
 47. Hamlet López García, "Cuban Society on the Horizon of Digital Transformation: A View from Mediations to the Social Appropriation of Technology", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 12, 1, (2020). 119-134.
 48. L T. Jiménez, G F M Morell, and E A Negrin, Cuban experiences on computing and education. In John, Impagliazzo (ed), *History of Computing and Education 3* (HCE3) (pp. 55-77). (Boston: Springer, 2008).
 49. Hamlet López García, "Cuban Society on the Horizon of Digital Transformation: A View from Mediations to the Social Appropriation of Technology", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 12, 1, (2020). 119-134.
 50. Barbara Ortutay, Frank Bajak, and Tali Arbel, "Cuba's Internet cut off: A go-to tactic to suppress dissent", *Associated Press*. July 12, 2021.
 51. On Cuba Staff "63% of Cubans have access to Internet according to government". *On Cuba*. February 28, 2020.
 52. The author visited the memorial and mausoleum on June 19, 2022 and saw the revolutionary life and times of Che and other martyrs.
 53. On June 21, 2022, the author visited the Fidel Castro Ruz Study Center. The Institute was created as a result of Law 123 approved by the National Assembly of People's Power of Cuba, on December 27, 2016. By law, it is prohibited to use Fidel Castro's name in squares, streets and other monuments. It was created under a provision, on

an exceptional basis, to create a place for the study of his life's work and thought, that would bear his name.

54. R Betancourt, "Social and Solidarity Economy and the Transformation of the Cuban Economic Model", *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 10, 2, (2018), p.209–229.
55. Ibid
56. A M Jose, and Jos Chathukulam, "New Cooperative Ministry in India: An Analysis of the Implied Strategy of Development for the Consideration of Policy Makers in India". *Mainstream Weekly*, LX 30, (2022).
57. Peter Utting, 'Introduction: The Challenge of Scaling Up Social and Solidarity Economy', in Peter Utting (ed.), *Social and Solidarity Economy: Beyond the Fringe*. London: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development/ZedBooks, pp. 1–40. (2015).
58. Sunil Ray, 'Employment Creation at Decentralized Level through Construction of Niche Structure and Promotion of Self-Organization', in Joseph Tharamangalam and Jos Chathukulam (Eds), *Deepening Democracy: Comparative Perspectives on Decentralisation, Co-operativism and Self-Managed Development*. Routledge Publishers, pp. 179-194. (2023).
59. Ibid.
60. Mahatma Gandhi, quoted by E. F. Schumacher in *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. E F Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as if People Mattered*. (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973).
61. J C Kumarappa, *The Economy of Permanence*, (Wardha, C.P: All India Village Industries Association, 1946). Also see, Nisha Velappan Nair, "Solidarity Economics and Gandhian Economics: Can They Supplement Each Other", *Gandhi Marg Quarterly*, 42(1&2): (2020). P.83–106.
62. T Bottomore, "A Marxist Consideration of Durkheim", *Social Forces*, 59, 4, (1981), p.902–917.
63. Jos Chathukulam, and Manasi Joseph, "Cuba Family Code Towards the Democratisation of Family and Society". *Economic and Political Weekly (EPW)*, Volume LVII No. 49, (December 3, 2022),
64. Jos Chathukulam, and Yoan Karell Acosta Gonzalez , "Is Cuban Family Code a Trendsetter?", *Mainstream Weekly*, VOL LXI No 1-2, (December 24, 2022).

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