




By VISHVESH KANDOLKAR

The Rise of the Villament: The New Investment Buzzword That Will Hit Goa

Villament has already become a buzzword in Bangalore's real estate lexicon (Anshul Dhamija, TOI: 2011). It is a concept that is gaining popularity, writes Dhamija, with those who want the luxury of a villa and yet crave the comfort and convenience an apartment affords. A villament is a large duplex apartment, usually with a double-height living room, large balconies and, most importantly, a terrace with a garden which gives the feeling that one is on the ground despite living in a high-rise building. Although the Goan real estate market is still rife with villas and apartments as separate building types, one can wager that the arrival of villaments is not too far off.

But before we focus on the impending arrival of villament-type developments in Goa, let us reflect on the current popular building type in the real-estate market, the vacation-house. In his seminal essay 'A time for space and a space for time: the social production of the vacation house' (Society and Architecture: 1980), sociologist-historian Anthony King broadly defines the vacation-house as the occasional residence of a household that usually lives elsewhere and which is primarily used for recreational purposes. He argues that the capitalist economy produces not only a surplus of wealth, but also, for a sizeable minority, a surplus of time. King claims that the motives of owning vacation homes include seeking compensation for city living, understood as escaping from perceived overcrowding, noise, traffic congestion, air pollution, and the pressures of city life (p.194). No wonder then that the elites of the large metropolises like Bombay and Delhi seek to own a vacation home in Goa, as it is perceived as a perfect holiday destination with its sun, sea, and sand, apart from the Europeanised atmosphere that they don't find anywhere else in India.

However, the vacation house is not simply a house; its very architecture differs from a full-time residence. King argues that the ideological preference for 'nature' results in a preference for country or semi-wilderness locations, preferably with extensive views. He says that these purpose-built houses have features which integrate the 'indoors' and 'out of doors' and at its most extreme, whole walls and roofs are cast as windows, giving extensive vistas of vegetation, or views of distant fields and beaches. King further elaborates that in densely settled vacation areas, the vacation homes are of courtyard plan, where their occupants turn their backs on the outside world to gaze at the enclosed vegetation of the court within. The



vacation-houses also use artificially produced 'natural' materials like the rough-cut timber, cane, grass matting, hand-woven fabrics; again these are attributes, King claims, of an ideology that is anti-urban, anti-industrial, and desirous of a 'simple life'. The strongest criticism that King confers on this type of lifestyle is that "[o]nly for the materially satiated did the 'simple life' have an appeal; the 'Great Outdoors' was attractive only if one had comfort within" (p.213).

During the 1990s, large vacation houses in Goa were generally the affairs of the super-rich, like the Mallays, who owned sprawling properties on 'virgin' sites overlooking the sea. Now, the situation has changed as a large number of the rising urban upper class, from Indian metros, are buying second homes in Goa. The surplus wealth created in metros gives these urban elites an advantage to invest in a comparatively cheaper real-estate market of Goa. The investment though is not limited to buying vacant land and villas, as many are also buying apartments to fulfil their need to have a second home in this Europeanised holiday destination. But it stands to reason that these investors will not be happy with simply buying any apartments. They would want their apartments to have the feel and features of vacation-houses. And this is where the concept of villaments with catch up, as it promises the luxury and feel of a villa yet is relatively affordable due to the stacking of many units on one piece of land. With the villament-type developments, the holiday homes in Goa are all set to go high-rise.

Increasingly, Goa as a tourist destination is not just in demand to be consumed for its 'sights', but worryingly, through 'sites', by the process of ownership, of this land and properties, by tourists (Raghuraman Trichur, *Refiguring Goa*: 2013). So, "What can we understand about a society by examining its buildings and physical environment?" (King: 1980). To say the least, the current real-estate developments in Goa reflect the aspirations of urban Indian society much more than the local needs of average Goans. While popular belief directs attention against the nibbling away of land by the poor migrants, one should be aware that the large, elite, property sharks from the Indian metros, ably aided by the local real estate industry, are taking bigger bites of this scarce land, and that too as a second, or a third, helping, in their insatiable lust for property ownership and leisure.

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