Tourism's Unsustainable Consumption of Goa

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ABSTRACT

At once uniquely regional, yet possessing international cache, it is Goa's Portuguese past that makes this now-Indian territory a site of consumption. Located along the western coast of the Indian subcontinent, it is not only the 'sights' of Goa that have been commercialized, but the very 'site' that has been occupied as elite India's playground. Goa is overburdened with tourism-based real-estate development, and, the latest trend is to own a second home, catering to the needs of the elites from the urban metropoli like Bombay and Delhi. Such second homes add to the environmental concerns of the place, especially when the basic needs of housing for the locals are ignored. This paper argues that luxury second homes, even if they are certified as 'green', are in fact environmentally as well as socially unsustainable for a given place.

Key Words: Goa, Sustainability, Second homes, Tourism

1. INTRODUCTION

In Goa, the consumption of second homes by elite Indians is a major cause of concern. Data in Census 2011 shows that more than quarter of Goan houses are unoccupied, as 125,000 homes in the state were vacant – a jump of close to 50,000 since Census 2001 (Malkarnekar, 2013). The environmentalists might have more important issues to pay attention to on a global scale, but the second-home ownership issue is *the* hidden giant that is being unjustifiably ignored (Müller & Hoogendoorn, 2013). Second homes are of many types (Hall & Müller, 2004; Paris, 2014) and it is important to distinguish between them in order to understand which of them cause bigger environmental and social harms. The real problems are the ones used especially for the purpose of recreation and luxury, such as vacation homes and weekend homes. Owning of such second homes is a continuation of a colonial way of being and operating, where there is a hierarchical interaction with people and a misappropriation of limited resources. This is especially the case in relatively smaller places like Goa, with the owners of luxury second homes, from Indian metropolis, operating as new colonisers who have no stakes in the future of the place.

There is a substantial difference in the history of Goa and that of India. While Goa was a Portuguese territory from 1510 to 1961, India was under the British from the 1800s to 1947. Apart from the duration of the periods, there is also a major difference in the characteristics of these two colonialisms. In his essay 'Between Prospero and Caliban: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and Inter-Identity' (2002), Boaventura Santos argues that Portuguese colonialism was seen as subaltern colonialism, especially from the norm of British colonialism (pg.11). Goa was also different because it continued to remain aloof from the imagination of the Indian nation as it was never a part of the nationalistic struggle for the end of British rule over India. While India got its independence from the British in 1947, Goa continued to remain a Portuguese territory. Subsequently in 1961, India annexed Goa from the Portuguese. The integration of Goa and Goans with India has been a protracted process as the 451 years of Portuguese colonialism has left an indelible mark on the Goan culture, which is markedly different from that of India. The Goan culture is predominantly Catholic, modern, and highly Europeanised. It is this culture which became a major tourist attraction for Indians, and has subsequently led many Indian elites to invest in second homes here.

The Indian elites who buy second homes in Goa are not here to settle. They are here to consume Goa and move on to greener pastures when the going is not good and the green is gone. As R. Benedito Ferrão, a critical commentator on the representation of Goa and Goans argues, 'Goa has now become a colony of a post-colony' (2016), literally, as its land and prime real-estate is controlled by the elites from Indian metros. The question of the current colonialism of Goa is more complex than mere appropriation of land. At once uniquely regional, yet possessing international cache, it is Goa's Portuguese past that makes this now-

Indian territory a site of consumption. As a pleasure periphery, Goa is at once India, but not quite - localized as a nearby neighbourhood, yet maintained as a space of otherness. By turning Goa into India's neighbouring getaway, such development privileges the desires of elite consumers over the immediate needs of Goa's own people, including access to affordable housing. Goa is now seen as a land where the people are not part of its distinctness - they can be erased and replaced - while their culture and their land are appropriated.

But what should we make of 'green' second homes in tourist destinations like Goa? The desire to use sustainable technology in construction of second homes is laudable, but it does not address the real issues of sustainability. Even if sustainable technology is used for the construction of second or third homes, the very idea of sustainability is defeated because sustainability in housing has to be about satisfying the primary needs of housing for all, and not about luxury of having multiple dwellings for a few. Not only has it become a fetish for elites from Indian metropolises to own second homes in Goa, but there is a clamour to have these buildings certified as 'green'. The increasing popularity of certification programs like India Green Building Council (IGBC) and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), has more to do with the marketing of real-estates rather than genuine concerns for the environment. The problem with such certification programs is that they use narrow 'technorational' (Guy & Farmer, 2001) ideas to define sustainability. The technorational idea of sustainability essentially rely excessively on technology to define 'green' buildings and it is 'overwhelmingly quantitative' (ibid). The technorational ideas also tend to focus on individual buildings to achieve sustainability rather than measuring the larger social and environmental impact of the building in a given place. This paper contends that luxury second homes, even if they are claimed to be certified as 'green', are totally unsustainable as they are insensitive to the social context of the place.

2. Goa as an Object of Desire

As argued earlier Goa did not share the same history as the rest of subcontinent prior to its integration into the Indian Republic in 1961. In his book, *Refiguring Goa: From Trading Post to Tourism destination* (2013), anthropologist Raghuraman Trichur argues that 'the shape and form of post-colonial India is largely defined by its British Colonialism', and therefore 'Goa never figured in this imagination of independent India' (pg.159, 160). Although India annexed Goa in 1961, Trichur claims, it was through the consumption of Goa in the 80s as a tourist destination that the place could be 'truly integrated' within India. But in order to project Goa as a unique tourist destination, it needed to be commoditized, and it is here that Goa's Portuguese past became its unique selling point. On the issues of tourism, nation-building and relocating of Goa in postcolonial India, Trichur writes:

> Tourism development contributed to Goa's integration with India - something even liberation could not achieve. The very issue of historical difference that impeded the integration of Goa with India, was successfully articulated as the cultural foundation to the tourist destination in Goa. This new form of

commoditization propelled the tourism destination, the space that accommodated the process, as the representative space for Goan society, validating the Indian and foreign imagination of Goa as a part of India with a 'difference'. Pg. 160

Not surprisingly, it is the Christmas season, a Portuguese legacy of Goan Catholics, when Goa is in peak tourist demand. Although, in terms of the territory Goa is a tiny state within India, it continues to be extremely popular tourist destination. Trichur states that because the tourist attractions are at the same time social, historical, and spatial, they are sites and sights of significance to tourists (pg.163). While in the 80s and the 90s, there was substantial increase in the number of visitors in Goa (Trichur, 2013), there were only the super-rich who were investing in buying second homes here. Since the turn of the century, the liberalisation of the Indian economy and the boom in the Indian middle-class, this trend has changed and many more rising elites are seeking to invest in a second home, making Goa their weekend getaway. Clearly, the focus has moved from merely enjoying Goa for its *sights* to the ownership of *sites*, in the form of real-estate properties.

There are a number of companies promoting real-estate properties in Goa ("Grounded: Earthy Luxury Villa Houses for sale in Goa,", "Tata Housing Goa Paradise,", "The Landings at Dabolim, Goa,"). The exoticness of this Europeanised destination is a trope that is highlighted through the marketing of these properties as 'Portuguese-styled bungalow' (Fernandes, 2015) to lure buyers from Indian metropolises to 'own a piece of this land' (Fernandes, 2016). Investing in Goa for the Indian urbanites is not just about buying a piece of land but rather for what this land signifies. Just as Jean Baudrillard (2008) suggests in his book, *The System of Objects*, that 'if a suburbanite aspires to move up into the lower-upper class, he will buy antiques — symbols of old social position bought with new money' [David McKay as quoted by Baudrillard in his book *System of Objects*, pg. 89.]. Similarly, the buyers of second homes in Goa are status seekers, aspiring for a piece of a 'tropical paradise', an exotic place with its landscape as much as its culture. Ownership of land in Goa allows these elites from Indian metros to brag about it in their cliques, for example, which is a performance of status.

The question to be asked is, if there are other locations along the western coast of India that are equally tropical, why is Goa much more in demand? Just as Baudrillard argues that although there are thousands of ways to signal social standing, the reference to the *past* is often chosen as a vector of status. The past of Goa has much more 'inherited value' as is reflected in its Portuguese heritage. After all, Goa was the 'Rome of the East'. Goa was a part of Portuguese territory for far longer (451 years) than most of the rest of India was under the British. Goa is 'exotic' for Indians because of this unique history and it is this piece of history that the rich desire. Therefore, acquiring a piece of property here is not merely about buying 'a piece of this land', but a larger status seeking mechanism for the urban elites from India.

2.1 Goa as Pleasure Periphery

The menace of second homes is on the rise in Goa because Goa is treated as a pleasure periphery. In his seminal essay 'A time for space and a space for time: the social production of the vacation house', Sociologist Anthony King (1980) 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 (pg. 194). Goa enjoys scenic settings, with world famous beaches, 'green' landscapes, as well as an Europeanised culture, which makes it a cosmopolitan destination for elite Indians. Tourism is a service industry selling experiences and therefore the beaches of Goa are framed as part of a 'tropical paradise' and Goa as a place for leisure and relaxation (Routledge, 2000). Many who invest here are looking for a 'getaway', to 'have a good time', rather than to merely invest their money in real-estate.

An article on www.moneycontrol.com, a website which claims to be India's number one financial portal, states that the "majority of real estate investments [in Goa] come from Delhi and Mumbai as people from these states, who once used Goa as holiday destination, are now buying their own cottage, villa or luxury house in the enchanting Goa" (sic). Premium property promoters, such as Saffronart, proffer the leisure incentive as the main incentive for buying a property in Goa. "Here's one purely fun situation where buying a [second] home clearly trumps renting one", writes R. Rashmi (2014) in an article on Saffronart's online portal. Her strongest argument for buying a home in Goa is because now the owners of this new property can "think nights of shenanigans with friends—pool parties, booze, loud music, dancing into the wee hours of the morning ... is mainly possible when you buy a home [in Goa]". Real-estate promoters like Saffronart seem to goad their clients, the elites in Indian metropolises, and the upwardly mobile, into not just buying a second home in Goa, but also buying into a certain lifestyle. The implications of these lifestyles on locals are severe, as they contribute to the rising cost of living in the state.

3. Architecture of a Vacation home:

A vacation house is not simply a house; its very architecture differs from a full-time residence. Enquiring into the notion of second homes, King (1980) argues that the ideological penchant 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 (pg.213). King critiques the anti-urban, and desirous of a 'simple life' ideology of vacation homes, as he states, that "only for the materially satiated did the 'simple life' have an appeal; the 'Great Outdoors' was attractive only if one had comfort within" (pg.213). This also marks a distinction in forms of labour. Not only is physical

labour used to build the homes in which such simplicity and restfulness takes place, but also the 'Great Outdoors' that these consumers are separated from is not only the seeming wilderness, but also the 'uncivil' populace, that is the 'unwashed' masses (including the labouring classes).

During the 1990s, large vacation houses in Goa were generally the affairs of the super-rich, like the liquor baron Vijay Mallya and Parsi entrepreneur Jamshed (Jimmy) Gazdar, who owned sprawling properties on 'virgin' sites overlooking the Arabian Sea. Currently, the situation has changed as a large number of the rising urban upper class, from Indian metros, are buying second homes in Goa. The investment though is not limited to buying vacant land and villas, as many are also buying apartments, in large projects like Tata housing at Dabolim in Goa, to fulfil their need to have a second home in this Europeanised holiday destination. The premium real-estate market, in contrast, has identified sustainable 'green' concepts to promote their properties, as will be clear through a case study of Nivim house.

4. The problematic of Second Homes as a 'Green' Building: The Case of Nivim House

Real-estate developers usually use 'Green' certifications for attracting investment interest and such buildings are not necessarily sustainable as they claim to be. The architects of Nivim house project, Rajiv D'Silva and Tallulah D'Silva, were forthcoming in their critique of green certifications. Tallulah said that it was the client Anjali Mangalgiri, who insisted on having the building certified as 'green' (T. D'Silva, 2016). In an interview in a local newspaper discussing their project, Tallulah D'Silva is clear in her assessment of the green certifications when she says: "[W]e have clients who want green buildings but don't want to get the building certified. The certification simply is a plus point if one intends to sell the property" (Das, 2014). Architect Rajiv D'Silva also stated that the certification of vacation homes as a green building is questionable because of its very use, and the fact that it remains unoccupied for most of the year (2014). Clearly, the certification of Nivim house, as "Goa's first green certified house"(Gaekwar, 2012), was important for the developers in order to get premium on its sale.

Sustainability too has become a catchphrase, another status-seeking trope that allows the new elites to indicate their social position. The elaborate documentation of Nivim as 'green' house on a blog ("New York Goa Diaries," 2013) was indeed to create a niche market for the developers. The name Nivim is derived from the name of the location of the property in North Goa. So, it is not just its certification but also its location which is used for marketing the property. Highlighting the architectural features of the property, the website mentions that "Nivim is an expansive country home meant to rediscover the quiet luxury found in nature". This is exactly the type of charm that the elites from congested Indian metros are bound to be attracted to. "Perched on a lush slope amongst tropical trees,

Nivim is the first green certified home in Goa", the company claims. To recall Baudrillard's analysis of buying pattern of rising urbanites, houses like Nivim fit the aspirational desires of those seeking to prove that they have arrived. Owning a property in an exotic destination like Goa, a property which additionally claims to offer, 'nature' as well as 'green-certification,' would surely symbolise the 'status' of these new urbanites within the elite class in India.

[Figure 1] *Green Building Certificate of Nivim house (Source: http://www.newyorkgoadiaries.com/search/label/Green%20Building)*

Nivim house being 'sold', the promoters have moved on to the next project, another "beautiful contemporary [second] home that retains the charm of a traditional *Goan-Portuguese courtyard home* and updates the same with *indoor-outdoor* spaces fit for the luxury of modern country living" [emphasis mine]. The 'indoor-outdoor' space is exactly kind of space King observes in typical vacation homes, whereas the 'Portuguese' legacy is also what the rising Indian urbanite seek in luxury second homes in Goa. Also, it is no co-incidence that the passive energy concepts of sustainability perfectly fit the image for vacation homes. Riding on such aspirational demands of Indian urbanites, real-estate companies like Build Grounded, promises, in its website, that the next project too will be "targeting Green Homes certification from the Indian Green Building Council". The 'green' building certification seems to be the latest fad for promoting luxury second homes in Goa.

It might appear that some real-estate companies claim to be 'honestly' working towards sustainable architecture in order to 'save' the planet. American urbanist Daniel Brook claims that LEED certification is a "system that's easy to game and has more to do with generating good PR [Public Relations] than saving the planet" (2007). The promoters and builders of the Nivim house also appear to do some "honest soul searching", as they ask in

their blog, "[W]hy would a person choose to live in Goa (part-time or full-time)?" (Mangalgiri, n.d.). However, this question is rhetorical as clearly their target buyers are not local Goan elites either. Their project is driven by profit and the use of sustainable 'green' concepts are identified as features the new Indian elites, who can afford such property, would buy. These are the urban elites, "person[s] [who need] to reconnect with nature", and want to assert their status by investing in sustainable property in Goa. The 'gold' green rating (refer figure 1), has been awarded to the Nivim house by IGBC, a certification program which is apparently based on LEEDs. The cons of such programs far outweigh its sustainable claims, writes Vanessa Quirk in an article titled 'Where is LEED Leading Us?… And Should We Follow?' (2012). The entire LEED certification has a fatal flaw, claims Quirk, and it is that "no matter the un-sustainability of the context (the middle of a desert, for example), no matter its purpose (even a structure for parking), if a building adheres to the requirements, a fundamentally unsustainable building could still attain LEED certification" (2012). This is as much true of second homes like Nivim house, which are intermittently used, as a vacation home or a weekend home, but they are nevertheless certifies as "Gold". Even if the project claims "100% use of solar power for water heating… Use of 3-star energy efficient refrigerator (40% less energy use) and 5-star rated air-conditioners (25% less energy use)… Use of solar control glass on east and west façade to reduce heat absorption to indoors" (Mangalgiri, 2012) among others, the project remains socially unsustainable. Recalling Kings observation on vacationers, they seem to fit the stereotypes who seek the 'outdoors' of Goa, but they cannot do without the luxury within, including the use of air-conditioners. Most local Goan homes, for instance, are not fitted with air-conditioners, and therefore probably more energy efficient. There is a wide gap between the comforts which the urbanite seek in tourist destination and the comforts which the local people are accustomed to. Moreover, as Rajiv D'Silva pointed out, all these sustainable energy claims are of no use when the vacation homes remain unoccupied for most of the year. Therefore, even if the second homes claim to have 'green' certification, they remain unsustainable because these second homes are a luxury.

5. The Problems of Technorational Ideas of Sustainability:

The popularity of certification programs like LEEDs and IGBCs has more to do with the marketing of real-estate rather than genuine concerns for the environment. The problem of such certification programs is that they use narrow 'technorational' ideas, which heavily relies on technology to define sustainability. In their article 'Reinterpreting Sustainable Architecture: the Place of Technology', Simon Guy and Graham Farmer (2001) note there are no consensual agreements on green buildings. Explaining the 'technorational' ideas of sustainable practices, Guy and Farmer write:

> In the case of building design, the emblematic issue is efficiency and, in line with global concerns, energy efficiency is prioritized. The negative environmental impacts of

buildings are assumed to be the result of a variety of inefficient practices implicit within the process of building production. The resulting design strategy is adaptive but based on recognizably modern, usually high-technology buildings that attempt to maximize the efficiency of building in spatial, construction, and energy terms. Pg.142

The rhetoric of the technorational approach, write Guy and Farmer, "tends to be overwhelmingly quantitative, success is expressed in the numerical reduction of building energy consumption, material-embodied energy, waste and resource-use reduction, and in concepts such as life-cycle flexibility and cost-benefit analysis" (pg.142). The issue of architectural sustainability must shift from technorational ideas by not focussing on individual buildings, like the luxury second homes. The other critiques of certification programs such as LEED's is that 'they have been focusing only on energy uses in the buildings', as seen in the claims of Nivim house above, and therefore limit the definition of sustainable buildings to 'one single environmental impact category' (Khan, Vandevyvere, & Allacker, 2013). The major problem with certification programs is that they are devoid of any consideration to the social and cultural contexts of a place.

It is the Eco-cultural logic (Guy & Farmer, 2001) of sustainability that seems to be most relevant to Goa, as this logic places stress on the need to move away from the universal concepts of sustainability and adhere to the cultural values of a particular place. Certification of individual luxury homes like Nivim is erroneous as it is merely one unit of the large second-home-tourism-industry. It is the large ecological footprint of the entire second-home industry, which makes all second homes unsustainable. Additionally, there is the cultural issue because these homes and their consumption are disconnected from the land they occupy and the people whose traditional home it is, even if many locals don't own the land in a capitalist sense.

The rise in numbers of second homes also leads to an unnecessary rise of the cost on construction and maintenance of additional public infrastructure, such as, roads, water-supply, electricity supply, and waste treatment plants (Clivaz, 2013). This is where the 'green' certification of individual buildings like luxury homes fail, as they do not consider the environmental cost of putting up the public infrastructure. Moreover, the costs for this additional public infrastructure tend to be borne by local governments, which leads to a further reduction of revenue to be used for the locals, especially for providing them with decent housing. Goans also feel the loss of control on their lands because the properties are being bought by 'outsiders', who are not emotionally invested in this place. Lastly, the demand of vacation and weekend homes leads to the conversion of land-uses, especially from orchards and agricultural uses to that of residential uses, leading to the further marginalisation of locals who are dependent on these occupations and are often tenants and not direct land-owners, reducing their say in the matter.

6. Second homes: a Global Problem

The menace of second homes is a global problem, which has plagued Goa as well. The tiny state is facing a huge dilemma over the ownership of high-end second homes (Raje, 2014). In 2012, the steering committee for the Regional Plan Goa 2021 (a planning committee which worked on land-use activity distribution, infrastructure, and settlement growth), headed by the late architect Charles Correa, did identify second homes as a problem and proposed additional taxation on them ("Owning holiday homes in Goa would now be a costly affair," 2011). But would mere taxation resolve the issue? The British government has increased taxation on second homes , but as Clive Aslet (2015), a second home owner in Britain argues, such moves are not going to solve the basic housing issues of the poor because the problem of housing is a structural one. Apparently, the British Government is not doing enough to supply homes for first time owners, and methods like taxation of second-home owners are actually a deflection from the real issues of housing. This is true in Goa as well. Besides, since the rich anyway invest in vacation homes for luxury, taxes would not deter them.

It is one thing to come to Goa for 'sights' and stay for few days, and quite another to own a second home. Such second homes are bound to be unsustainable at the regional level as they unnecessarily increase the ecological footprint (Wackernagel & Rees, 1996) of the place. The issues of unsustainability of second homes in Goa is similar to that of the high demands of second homes in the European Alps (Clivaz, 2013; Schuler & Dessemontet, 2013). From the point of view of tourism, Clivaz claims that the issues of owning second homes are "from an economic point of view, the idea of 'selling the cow' (land and real estate) rather than 'selling the milk' (tourism services) [which] gradually sets in motion a vicious circle: poorly controlled urbanisation and a decrease in the attractiveness of the destination [which will eventually] result in a loss of market...for tourism businesses" (2013). Switzerland is another place that inordinately suffers the menace of second-home buyers, essentially elites from urban areas who occasionally want to live with 'nature'. Not surprisingly therefore, on 11 March 2012, in a popular vote, the Swiss population approved an initiative proposed by ecologist Franz Weber calling for a halt on the construction of new second homes in districts where such homes already exceeded a threshold of 20% of total housing stock (Schuler & Dessemontet, 2013). A similar initiative needs to be taken up in Goa, for which the first step would be a detailed survey and building utilization mapping of luxury weekend homes.

7. Conclusion:

I am not against the use of sustainable energy concept for buildings in general, but one should be concerned when unsustainable buildings like luxury second homes get certified as 'green'. Sustainability cannot be held hostage by certification programs like LEED's. On the other hand, we must also be wary of the myth that tourism is an environmentally friendly industry. This is especially because, since the '80s, the Goa government has been promoting

tourism as an industry which would provide 'environmentally friendly and culturally sensitive employment opportunities' to the Goans (Trichur, 2013). Ironically, in the name of tourism, the invading Indian elites are destroying Goa on both counts, cultural as much as environmental. In order for Goa to manifest as the idealized location for a second home, it is rendered as a pleasure periphery. Here, Goa's Portuguese past, and its later annexation by India, serves this purpose well, for Goa then functions as if it were a part of India, yet apart. If Southern Europe is the other to Western Europe, as Boaventura Santos(2002) argues, then in South Asia, Goa – the former colony of Iberia – appropriately fills the role of the other to India, the country of its annexation, and once also a former colony of Britain.

Today, increasing number of Indian elites, who visit Goa for leisure, want to have a 'piece of this land' by owning a vacation home here. Opposition from the locals goes unheard because the national government has economic and political interests in this kind of development. To add insult to injury, the second home owners claim that these second homes are 'sustainable'. Owning a second home, even if the elites claim that these homes are certified as 'green', is a mockery of real issues of sustainability. We need to revisit the ideas of sustainability in architecture, as not just an issue of energy, but also of appropriateness of the use of the building, the cultural sensitivity to the land on which the building sits, the consideration of wider infrastructure that a building needs, and most importantly incorporation of the concerns of the local people around.

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