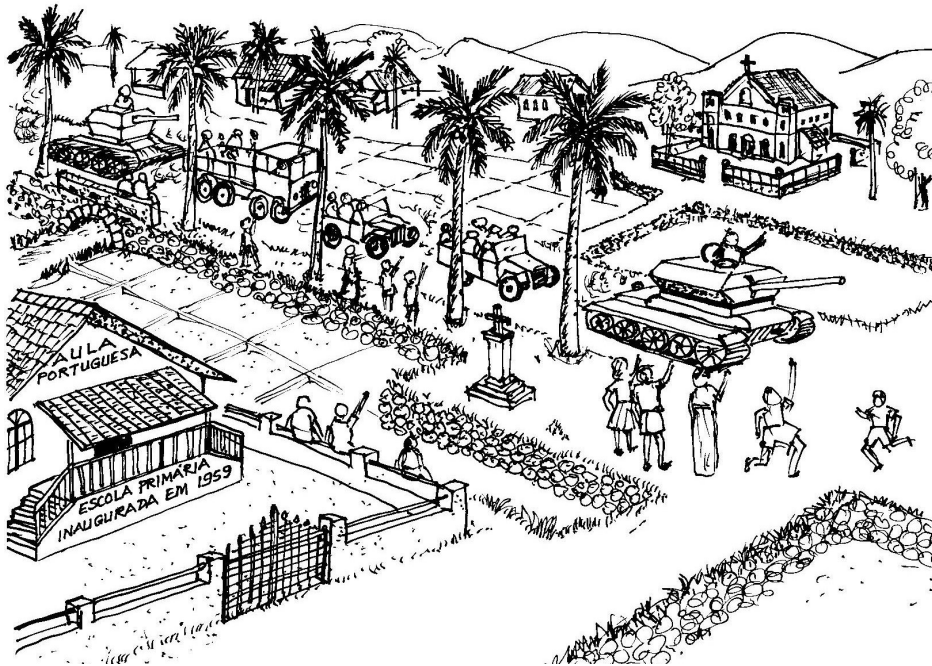


A childhood memoir by Tony Fernandes



Indian Army tanks, jeeps, trucks, gun-carriages, etc. rumbling through an unpaved by-road in Guirim, Cumbiem Morod, Bardez, Goa.

On the left is the old Portuguese primary school, and on the far left is the Chapel of Our Lady of Assumption, Vancio Vaddo.

Children are waving out to the soldiers.

CUMBIEM MOROD, GUIRIM, BARDEZ, GOA: -----

I recall that cold morning. I had risen early to study for my second tri-monthly examinations. Mother was in the kitchen, preparing tea. It was then that I heard ear-deafening noise of what seemed to be low-flying aircraft.

A little later, I put out the kerosene chimney lamp. Mother and I cautiously peeked out of the window, but saw nothing.

The sun had not yet risen. The pre-dawn sky in the east cast a faint scarlet glow. I could feel Mother's fear, as the preceding days had been quite tense. We were aware of the trouble that had been brewing up. A statue at Mapuca had been blown up a few days earlier, causing anxiety among the populace.

Suddenly we heard a knock on our door. We remained still and silent and only opened the door upon realizing it was our neighbours, calling out to us in low voices. They had come over to ask Mother whether she had any idea what was happening around us. Mother told them that she thought that the noise came from fighter aircraft, as a result of the political tension prevailing at the time.

We all went out when the sun had risen. We could see smoke billowing out from the town in the distance.

By noon the word had spread that the Indian Army had reached Mapuca and that Air Force jets had bombed the army barracks and some government buildings in town. We also learned that the barracks there were in fact empty at the time.

The Portuguese soldiers had probably left the previous night on the orders of the Governor General. He was subsequently considered to be a wise man in ordering a retreat and a surrender that followed. It was the talk in our village that he did not want the Portuguese soldiers to put up a fight, as human lives would have been lost in the crossfire -- in the event of bombing

and fighting between the armies.

I realized that my mother's appearance was one of sadness. I felt sad too as I could not go to school. The Indian Army had occupied my school, pitching their tents on our football field. SC

My father had always said that we would one day be liberated, but my mother thought otherwise.

I remember running on the winding path leading to the red mud road that passed through our village, along with other boys, to see the Indian Army proceeding slowly, heading for the capital, Panjim. Certain sections of the main road from Mapuca to Panjim were not usable. The bridges were destroyed by the retreating Portuguese soldiers.

I saw young boys, accompanied by older folks of our village, waving out to the Indian soldiers sitting on top of their tanks in full battle gear. I waved out as well! The boys shouted "Jai Hind" and I followed doing the same.

I was fascinated with the artillery comprising of huge tanks, armoured cars, jeeps and trailers, gun carriages with canons of different shapes and sizes towed by trucks, proceeding towards Panjim. They created clouds of dust as they rumbled along. Most of the soldiers had moustaches, beards and turbans: all were smiling. The line of army vehicles continued long after dusk and trickled into the night.

The situation remained tense for many days and nights. A sudden hush seemed to hover over our lives. We returned home playing football in the fields long before sunset.

One evening, as we wound up our usual play at our improvised football ground, I overheard some of the bigger boys saying that we were now 'Indian subjects'. But the only 'subjects' that I was concerned about were those of my curriculum like Geography, History and Religion, that had to be postponed into the New Year.

It seemed like everything had come to a halt. School football tournaments were canceled as both our football fields remained occupied by the Army for some time.

Our juniors
volley ball finals were disrupted.

There was no midnight Mass in my favourite church or at any other chapel in our village that Christmas and no New Year's Eve Dance. Perhaps it must have been the only New Year's Eve when Johnson & His Jolly Boys -- the hot favourites of the time -- did not play.

It was long before mid-night that the lamps and candles burnt themselves out in the lanterns and Christmas stars in front of the houses in my village during the Yuletide of that year.

Everything was calm, quiet and dark with the exception of the brilliant star-lit sky. Everything was silent (including the radio as the transmission station "Emissora de Goa" was put out of action) except for the intermittent hooting of the owl -- heard but never seen,

along with the dogs barking most of night in the
neighbourhood,
and the
occasional howl of the wolf in the wee
hours of the morning.