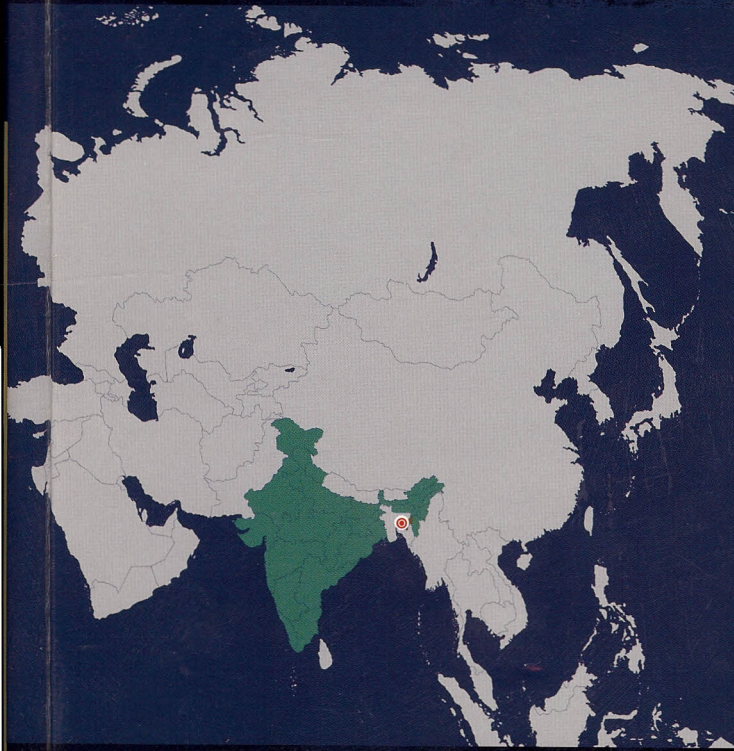




B L VOHRA



TRIPURA'S BRAVEHEARTS

A POLICE SUCCESS STORY OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

TRIPURA'S BRAVEHEARTS

A Police Success Story of Counterinsurgency

B.L. Vohra



KONARK PUBLISHERS PVT LTD
New Delhi • Seattle

Konark Publishers Pvt Ltd

206, First Floor, Peacock Lane,
Shahpur Jat,
New Delhi-110 049.
Phone: +91-11-41055065, 65254972
e-mail: india@konarkpublishers.com
Website: www.konarkpublishers.com



Konark Publishers International

1507 Western Avenue, #605,
Seattle, WA 98101
Phone: (415) 409-9988
e-mail: us@konarkpublishers.com

363. 2095415
VOH

Copyright © B.L. Vohra, 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Cataloging in Publication Data—DK

Courtesy: D.K. Agencies (P) Ltd. <docinfo@dkagencies.com>

Vohra, B. L., 1944-

Tripura's bravehearts : a police success story of counterinsurgency /
B.L. Vohra.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 8122007937

1. Vohra, B. L., 1944-
2. Police—India—Tripura—Biography.
3. Counterinsurgency—India—Tripura.
4. Tripura (India)—Politics and government. I. Title.

DDC 363.2092 22

Editor: Seema Sreenivas

Typeset by The Laser Printers, New Delhi, and
printed at ASK Advertising Aids Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

*Dedicated to the policemen of India
who are second to none
in serving the country*

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge with thanks the permission given by Shri Manas Paul, the author of the book *The Eyewitness* (2009) and its publisher Lancer Publishers, New Delhi, for permitting me to use some extracts from this book including a few quotes of Shri Subir Bhaumik, the celebrated author and journalist from his book 'Insurgent Crossfire' and his presentation about the decommissioning of Dumbur Hydel Project before the World Commission on Dams in 2002.

I also acknowledge that the books/publications given in the References in the book were useful for the purpose of my book.

Similarly I also acknowledge the following newspapers from which I have added articles/editorials in the Appendix to the book:

1. *The Statesman*
2. *Tripura Times*
3. *The Hindustan Times*
4. *Tripura Observer*
5. *The Telegraph*
6. *The Times of India*

01.01.2011

B. L. VOHRA

Gopal K. Pillai



गृह सचिव
HOME SECRETARY
भारत सरकार
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

North Block,
New Delhi.

17 January, 2011

FOREWORD

I was delighted to be requested by B.L. Vohra to write the foreword to his book. The book is a comprehensive account of the causes of insurgency in Tripura and how the State Government and the police tackle the same. The key point that B.L. Vohra brings out is the primary importance of the local police in tackling insurgency situations. It is also a tribute to the honest political leadership in the State.

He brings out the importance both of good leadership from the police as also the basic policing requirements that need to be put in place. The strengthening of Police Stations, field visits, talking with police officials and talking with the people are critical requirements for tackling insurgency anywhere.

He brings out in a comprehensive manner the root causes for the alienation and the manner in which the State and the Central Governments tackle the situation. It required a major communal riot in 1980 to get the Central and State Governments to realize there was a serious problem in the State. It is only thereafter, in 1984, that an Autonomous District Council was set up under the Sixth Schedule, which has, over the last two decades, contributed in some measure in reducing the alienation of the tribal community. It would have been useful if details of the functions of TTAADC and the achievements had also been documented.

His account of long jungle treks to remote police outposts and related adventures while traveling in a boat in the Dumboor Lake makes *delightful reading*. The practice of "balancing arrests" is something that many police forces do to give an appearance of even handedness, but most times these lead to further injustice. The important point that he brings about is that good leadership is essential and this has to flow from the top. One may not have control of the entire situation, but that does not mean that one cannot act in areas where one can.

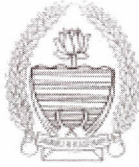
The insurgency situation in Tripura has been controlled to a very large extent. The credit for this is rightly given to the State Police and the political leadership. B.L. Vohra points out the need for continued vigilance and the need to completely eliminate the root causes of alienation, namely, of land and lack of economic development among the tribals. If these are not tackled on a sustained basis, trouble can break out again. I would commend this book to all for its very comprehensive approach. B.L. is realistic and although he may have blown his own trumpet, it is something that the results have shown to be well deserved.

I congratulate the Tripura police, especially the TSR for the quality of heart and mind and the bravery shown in tackling insurgency in Tripura. Let us hope that insurgency never again returns to the State.


(Gopal K. Pillai)



सत्यमेव जयते



GOVERNOR
JAMMU & KASHMIR

RAJ BHAVAN
JAMMU-180001

Introduction

During the long period of colonial rule some of the best known books on India's history, geography, culture, archaeology, wild life, ornithology, administration, and on varied other subjects, were written by British officers who had served in the Army, Police, Civil Administration and other arenas in the distant parts of the country.

In post-Independence India, not very many among those who served the country in the initial years have written about their experiences. Fortunately, in the past about two decades, there has been a steady flow of memoirs by former civil servants, diplomats, police officers, journalists and others. These books, taken together, tell us about the challenges faced by the country and its growth and development since 1947. I believe that all these writings comprise an invaluable resource for those who may, in the coming years, choose to write the history of modern India.

Among the books written by former civil servants and others in the past years there are very few worthwhile writings which relate to the North-Eastern States. In this context I was happy to see the manuscript of "Tripura's Bravehearts: A Police Success Story of Counterinsurgency", written by Bhushanlal Vohra, an Indian Police Service Officer who joined the Manipur-Tripura (MT) cadre in 1967. During his eventful career this officer served in almost all the Central Police Forces and was chosen, in 2000, to be appointed the Police Chief of Tripura.

Besides informing the reader about the author's experiences in Manipur and Tripura, this book provides an extensive perspective of the historical developments which led to the emergence of insurgency in the peaceful Hindu Kingdom of Tripura. We learn how the unrestrained influx of unlawful immigrants from East Bengal (later Bangladesh), from early 1940s onwards, resulted in a singularly predominant and proud tribal community in this small territory (earlier a Part C State) being reduced to a disregarded minority. And how the consequential tensions and conflicts, vigorously encouraged by trans-border adversary elements and exacerbated by erroneous judgements and inadequate responses of successive State Governments, led to the growth of insurgency.

The author has written without rancour even about the less savoury incidents during his years of service in Tripura. On the contrary, while tracing the roots of insurgency and recounting the varied bold initiatives which he took to revive the Tripura State Rifles (TSR), he has recorded high praise of the strong support which he received from the Chief Minister and Chief Secretary, the former an unusually honest politician and the latter a competent and upright officer who belonged to distant Kerala. The author honestly acknowledges that he would not have been successful in turning the TSR around if he had not received continued encouragement from these two authorities.

By all accounts, from the facts and figures given in the book, the author achieved eminent success in reviving the morale, confidence and professionalism of TSR by leading from the front and, thereafter, utilising this re-invigorated Force to effectively combating the insurgent groups and laying the foundations of peace returning to Tripura.

I believe that this book would be of great interest to the future generations of all those who have the privilege to serve in the North-Eastern States, particularly Police Officers who are required to serve in Tripura in the coming years. This volume should also interest the Union Home Ministry, and other concerned Central authorities, particularly the chapters which trace the roots of the insurgency and the many unsound decisions which contributed to enlarging the problem.

I compliment the author for his timely initiative of writing on a relevant theme at a time when the country is facing varied serious challenges to safeguarding the safety and security of its people.

20th Jan, 2011
Jammu.



(N.N. Vohra)

Preface

This book has been written for many reasons. Firstly the success of counter-insurgency operations led by the local police in Tripura, a state in north-eastern India, beginning in the year 2000 is a great success story. It is the only one after the success of the Punjab police in similar circumstances in the country and needs to be told as it is not known to the rest of the country and the world. In a period of about two years the police was able to turn the corner decisively. It took a few years thereafter to complete the gains and Tripura today is a peaceful state that continues to prosper. The important lesson is that no outside force can tackle such a serious problems and only an effort led by the local police will bring the results. The policy makers should keep this in mind.

This small state in the northeast of India was one of the most violent, having an average of 36.7 percent of insurgency led crime in the period 1998-2000 as against the national average of 13.5 percent according to the figures published by the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB). In the insurgency that lasted more than two decades from the late 1970s or so thousands of lives of innocent Hindu Bengalis and local tribals had been lost. The situation had gone completely out of hand. But then from 2000 onwards the local police supported politically by the Chief Minister Manik Sarkar and the bureaucracy led by the Chief Secretary V. Thulasidas set out to defeat the insurgents decisively. This

success story has lessons which we are learning now in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in the last week of November, 2008 or the Maoists' attacks in the red corridor, the most ferocious being the Dantewada massacre of 76 CRPF personnel on 6th April, 2010. One wishes some of these lessons had been learnt earlier and acted upon. To quote an example: on 1st January, 2009, the then new Union Home Minister of India P. Chidambaram announced that India will have 20 counter-insurgency training schools. Tripura had opened such a school for its police force nine years back. Before this announcement he had also written to the Chief Ministers of all states to hold daily meetings with their Chief Secretary and Director General of Police. This was being done on every Monday a decade back by the Chief Minister of Tripura which continues till date and that made a lot of difference in tackling the situation. Unfortunately we don't learn lessons from our other experiences.

Secondly not much has been written exclusively on insurgency in individual states in that region. Most of the books cover all aspects of all the states of the north-east in a combined volume with bare mentions of the insurgency. But each state has its own unique story about insurgency wherever it exists and that needs to be told separately. That is the reason for this effort about Tripura.

Thirdly the Tripura story is unique in many ways. For example almost the whole of this small state protrudes into Bangladesh and it is the only one having such a unique geographical location.

Fourthly the change in the demographic profile of the state that had led to insurgency was not because of the migration of Muslims from Bangladesh but of Hindus from that country. The common perception in the rest of India based on what they hear about Assam is that the problem in Tripura is also because of the migration of Muslims from Bangladesh which is not correct. This needs to be told. Additionally what is generally not known is that Tripura

played a very important role in the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 due to its geographical location—a fact that is recognized more in Bangladesh than in India. Many leaders and other activists of their liberation struggle took shelter in several areas of Tripura including Agartala, the state capital, during those difficult days of struggle with Pakistan and got full support from the locals. In addition, many operations of the Mukti Bahini and Indian Defence Forces were launched from the soil of Tripura for the liberation of Bangladesh. Unfortunately the very geographical location of the state, protruding into Bangladesh as it were, has now become a source of pain for it and India as many insurgent groups of the northeast walk over/return to and from Bangladesh with support from that country leading to all kinds of problems for India.

It is also worth mentioning here that Tripura is considered to be the least corrupt state in the country as the top political leadership including the Chief Minister, who is a CPM leader, is honest. So much so, it is said that even today he deposits the salary that he gets from the government in the party funds and from where he gets a meager allowance to run his kitchen. This political leadership also had the political will to support action against the insurgents and then quickly implemented development schemes in the areas freed from the insurgency. This only proves the point that if the top political leadership is honest personally, has the political will to take on the insurgents and support its officers, especially the police in this task, the same group of officers who are considered inefficient elsewhere in tackling insurgency can deliver what is needed for the society. About the honest work of politicians being rewarded there can be no better example than the victories of different political parties in four states—the Janata Dal (United)/Bhartiya Janata Party combine in Bihar recently, the Congress in Delhi and the Bharatiya Janata Party in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh during the last Assembly elections in these states. The same has been true

of Tripura where the CPM has been rewarded politically by the public in similar circumstances during the last Assembly elections which it won hands down. In fact in the whole of the northeast, Tripura is the only small state where parliamentary democracy is functioning well. The other exception is Assam but that is a big state. This is another reason that this success story needs to be told.

One more purpose in telling this story is that security and development are like the proverbial chicken and egg story. We are seeing this in the latest Maoist menace in many states. What the police can do is reduce the violence and weaken the insurgents/terrorists, which then can be used to usher in development at a fast pace. That is what happened in Tripura. It is nobody's case that the police or security forces or army can solve insurgencies for ever in a place but they can create conditions conducive to bring about such a result. That is what the local police achieved in Tripura and turned the tide in favour of the public and the government.

I am writing this story because I had the privilege and honour of leading the Tripura State Police as Director General of Police from May, 2000 to July, 2002, when the local police turned the corner against the insurgents successfully due to its leadership of counter-insurgency operations at the peak of insurgency.

A legitimate question can be asked as to why am I writing this book so late? Well it is always better to look at events from a distance to gain a more objective perspective. Hence I thought that the time is right for me to write it especially due to the climate of terrorism that the country is facing all over to convey that we can control it provided we have the will and determination to do it. Tripura may be a small state but the problems were no different from other big or important states and so solutions also won't be different, though those will be on a bigger scale in bigger areas and states.

Yet another stone cast at me could be that this is an

autobiographical book and that I am trying to blow my own trumpet. Well it has to be autobiographical to some extent as I happened to be one of the key players during that period of successful counter insurgency operations though my posting there was not designed by me. And since the success came during my tenure, it needs to be told even though it may sound as if I am blowing my own trumpet which actually is not the case.

Undoubtedly the CM Mr Manik Sarkar and the CS Mr V. Thulasidas helped the police a great deal in achieving this success but the real stars responsible for this success were the policemen of all ranks of the state who took up the challenge of tackling head on a two decade old insurgency and brought about a remarkable change for the better in a short span of two years. Since many people do not know about their success it needs to be told.

There are many people who deserve my gratitude for helping me in writing this book. At the top is Manik Sarkar, the Chief Minister of Tripura, who not only encouraged me to write this book but also graciously offered the assistance of the entire government of Tripura in writing it. I am extremely grateful to him.

My grateful thanks are also due to K.P.S. Gill, my senior colleague from the Indian Police Service, from whom I learnt a lot in service when I had the privilege of working with him. As DGP Punjab he brought back Punjab from the brink of a disaster and he will be always remembered for his great contribution to the country. He encouraged and guided me in writing this book. Then there were many others who have helped me. It is a long list and my thanks to all of them. I would especially like to thank Sh. Pranay Sahay, former DGP Tripura and his officers for their great assistance. My thanks to Shri Dilipjit Deb Barma IGP (Retd.) also of Tripura who helped me a lot in work earlier and now in writing this book. Journalists Manas Paul and Jayanta Debnath helped me in this venture and I am indebted to them.

I would also like to thank my wife and children who supported me during that difficult and challenging period and now in writing this book. And of course Konark the publishers, led by my dynamic friend K.P.R. Nair, deserve a big thanks for bringing out this book in an excellent form.

Let me add at the end that all the views expressed in the book are my own and if I have faltered on any account, I alone am responsible. I would welcome any comments/criticisms/suggestions at blvohra@m5trainers.com.

1st January 2011
New Delhi

B.L.VOHRA

Acronyms

ADC	Autonomous District Council
ATPLO	All Tripura Peoples Liberation Organization
ATTF	All Tripura Tiger Force
BDR	Bangladesh Rifles
BLA	Bengali Liberation Army
BNCT	Borok National Council of Tripura
BNLF	Bru National Liberation Front
BNP	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
BOP	Border Outpost
BSF	Border Security Force
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tract
CISF	Central Industrial Security Force
CM	Chief Minister
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CRPF	Central Reserve Police Force
CS	Chief Secretary
DGFI	Directorate General of Field Intelligence (of Bangladesh)
DGP	Director General of Police

DIG	Deputy Inspector General
DLOG	District Level Operational Group
DSP	Deputy Superintendent of Police
FRRO	Foreigners Regional Registration Officer
IA&AS	Indian Audit & Accounts Service
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
IB	Intelligence Bureau
IG	Inspector General
INPT	Indigenous Nationalist Party of Tripura
IPS	Indian Police Service
IRS	Indian Revenue Service
ISI	Inter Services Intelligence (of Pakistan)
J&K	Jammu and Kashmir
JEI	Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh Nationalist Party)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam
MHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MISA	Maintenance of Internal Security Act
MNF	Mizo National Front
NLFT	National Liberation Front of Tripura
NNC	Naga Nationalist Council
NSCN (IM)	National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muviah group)
NSCN	Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland
NSG	National Security Guard
ONGC	Oil and Natural Gas Commission
PLA	Peoples Liberation Army (of Manipur)
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
POW	Prisoner of War
PPP	Pakistan Peoples' Party

PREPAK	Peoples' Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (of Manipur)
R&AW	Research and Analysis Wing
RAB	Rapid Action Battalion (of Bangladesh)
ROP	Road Opening Party
SDM	Sub Divisional Magistrate
SHO	Station House Officer
SLOG	State Level Operational Group
SP	Superintendent of Police
SPO	Special Police Officer
TNV	Tripura National Volunteers
TRA	Tripura Resurrection Army
TSR	Tripura State Rifles
TTAADC	Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council
TUJS	Tripura Upjati Juba Samity
UBLF	United Bengali Liberation Front
UNLF	United National Liberation Front (of Manipur)
UP	Uttar Pradesh
VIP	Very Important Person

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Acronyms</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Chapter I</i>	
Baptism by Fire	1
<i>Chapter II</i>	
Historical Perspective	29
<i>Chapter III</i>	
Roots of Insurgency	50
<i>Chapter IV</i>	
Utter Callousness	82
<i>Chapter V</i>	
Stabbing in the Back	106
<i>Chapter VI</i>	
Nature and Patterns of Insurgency	126

<i>Chapter VII</i>	
The Fight Back	148
<i>Chapter VIII</i>	
Guarding the Future	208
<i>Appendix</i>	227
<i>References</i>	239
<i>INDEX</i>	241



Very few people in India know about Tripura, its fascinating history, of its fight against the insurgency and how and when it was controlled. It was a big empire once upon a time dating back to the days of Mahabharata and finds a mention in the epic. By the time the partition of India took place in 1947 it had become a small state due to the vagaries of history. At that time it lost quite a bit of land and communications facilities to what was then East Pakistan and now Bangladesh. The seeds of insurgency in the state were sowed decades back when the Muslim League demanded the partition of India by dividing Punjab and Bengal in the mid 1940s. Many Hindus came over to Tripura and soon became the majority in the state whereas the local tribals had earlier formed the majority. This led to discontentment among the tribals, which manifested itself in many forms till it became a full-fledged insurgency in the late 1970s. From then on it grew in strength and by 2000 it had become a hydra headed monster. It was then that the state police backed by strong political will took on the insurgents and defeated them using innovative strategies.

This book tells the story of this success. It also proves the case in point *that only the efforts led by the local police can handle such situations effectively.*

Though the violence has been contained the issues of the tribals still remain in Tripura. One only hopes that these will be taken care of to avoid a return to insurgency in the future.



B.L.Vohra led the war against terrorism and insurgency in Tripura as Director General of Police with innovative and swift counterinsurgency measures thereby turning the corner decisively against the decades old insurgency in the state. An officer of the 1967 batch of the Indian Police Service, he had earlier served with distinction in Punjab, J&K and Manipur in different capacities, handling counter terrorism operations. He is the recipient of the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service besides other medals and honours. Post retirement he was instrumental in retrieving government land worth thousands of crores from encroachers in Delhi as a member of the Monitoring Committee of Delhi High Court. Recently he was nominated as 'Eminent Citizen' by the Government of India to monitor expenditure under MGNREGA. He has authored 11 books so far and trains executives in soft skills. He is also the President of the NGO Vastradan.

PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

An insider's view of one of India's most dramatic and comprehensive counter-insurgency successes. A must-read for the sheer detail it gives on a violent and protracted conflict in a distant and little known corner of the country. Tripura's campaigns have crucial lessons for counter-insurgency everywhere, and Vohra has done exemplary service in documenting and explaining this profound experience.

Shri K. P. S. Gill, Former DGP, Punjab

Combining his depth of scholarship with his extraordinary breadth of experience, Mr B. L. Vohra, in Tripura Bravehearts, has written not only a definitive history of the transformation of Tripura, but also provided a primer for our times when Maoist insurgency is India's most serious internal security challenge. This book is an invaluable contribution to the literature on law, politics and governance. It is a must read for all those who have a stake in the idea of India and the need to understand the million mutinies that make it.

Shri Shekhar Gupta, Editor-in-Chief, Indian Express

By all accounts, from the facts and figures given in the book, the author achieved eminent success in reviving the morale, confidence and professionalism of Tripura police/TSR by leading from the front and, thereafter, utilising this re-invigorated Force to effectively combating the insurgent groups and laying the foundations of peace returning to Tripura.....This volume should also interest the Union Home Ministry, and other concerned Central authorities, particularly the chapters which trace the roots of the insurgency and the many unsound decisions which contributed to enlarging the problem.... I compliment the author for his timely initiative of writing on a relevant theme at a time when the country is facing varied serious challenges to safeguarding the safety and security of its people.

Shri N. N. Vohra, Governor of J&K

The book is a comprehensive account of the causes of insurgency in Tripura and how the State Government and the police tackled the same. The key point that B. L. Vohra brings out is the primary importance of the local police in tackling insurgency situations. It is also a tribute to the honest political leadership in the State. He brings out the importance both of good leadership from the police as also the basic policing requirements that need to be put in place....I would commend this book to all for its very comprehensive approach.

Shri G. K. Pillai, Union Home Secretary

It is an absorbing book by a police officer with wide exposure who adhered to the philosophy that policing is a team game and you have to carry people along by the skill of your profession and not merely by the force of the rank you hold. He even walked forty miles in the insurgency hot spot in his late fifties to prove that he leads by example. He was au fait with insurgency and led the state police to dominate over the insurgents with the assistance of the local youth as special police officers.

Shri R. S. Mooshahary, Governor of Meghalaya

₹ 595

ISBN 978-81-220-00793-0



**KONARK PUBLISHERS PVT LTD
NEW DELHI • SEATTLE**