

THE GEOPOLITICAL RELEVANCE OF INDIA'S SILIGURI-DOOARS CORRIDOR

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the requirements for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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Date: 29.12.2022

DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**The Geopolitical Relevance of India’s Siliguri-Dooars Corridor**” submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

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*Dedicated to
Mummy and Papa*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB -	Asian Development Bank
AILG -	All India Gorkha League
ASEAN -	Association of South East Asian Nations
BBIN -	Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal
BCIM- EC -	Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic corridor
BIMSTEC -	The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic cooperation.
BRI -	Belt and Road Initiative
CPI-	Communist Party of India
CRPF -	Central Reserve Police Force
CUTS -	Centre for International Trade Economics and Environment
DGHC -	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council
EC -	Economic Corridor
FDI -	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP -	Gross Domestic Product
GJMM -	Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha
GMS -	Greater Mekong Sub-region
GNLF -	Gorkha National Liberation Front
GTA -	Gorkha Territorial Administration
ISI -	Inter-Services Intelligence
ISIS -	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

ITBP -	Indo-Tibetan Border Police
IWAI -	Inland Waterways Authority of India
MVA -	Motor Vehicle Agreement
NC -	North Cachar
NDFB -	National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NEFA -	North East Frontier Agency
NER -	North Eastern Region
NFR -	Northeast Frontier Railway
NH -	National Highway
NHRC -	National Human Rights Commission India
NRC -	National Register of Citizens
OSRT -	Office of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Persons
PLA -	People's Liberation Army
SAARC -	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SC -	Scheduled Caste
SASEC -	South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation
SSB -	Sashastra Seema Bal
ST -	Scheduled Tribe
TIP -	Trafficking in Persons
TMC -	All India Trinamool Congress
TTE -	Trade, Transport, Energy
ULFA -	United Liberation Front of Assam
UNCATD -	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNESCAP -	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This Chapter attempts to give a theoretical perspective of geopolitics and explores the idea and the concept of the corridor discourse providing various dimensions. Along with this backdrop the following other chapters focus on the geopolitical relevance of India's Siliguri and Dooars corridor, its evolution and further aims to examine and explore its significance, potential and the future prospects of the corridor.

The Siliguri-Dooars corridor positioned at the foothills of the eastern Himalayan region, in Darjeeling district positioned at West Bengal is a sensitive region holding a strategic importance as a center point located between Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Chumbi Hills in the eastern Himalayas that connects the Indian main land to the rest of its North Eastern states. The corridor consists mainly five districts of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Cooch Bihar, Kalimpong and Alipurduar. The study traces back the origin and the evolution of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor. Similar to the majority of the South Asian borders, the Siliguri- Dooars corridor referred to as the "Chicken Neck" corridor because of its form, has been a cartographical relic of the decolonization process from the Britishers. Siliguri as a small town came into prominence after the Indian independence from the British rule that was followed by Partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan (West Pakistan and East Pakistan) on religious grounds. The international boundary drawn by the Radcliff commission led to India losing a major chunk of Bengal. The corridor further gained its relevance with a series of historic events such as the liberation of Bangladesh in the year 1971 followed by and the merger of Sikkim in the year 1975 (Panda 2013:1).

The fact that this corridor is located in such close proximity to Chumbi Valley, which is located to the north of Doklam at the trijunction of China, Sikkim, and Bhutan, has contributed to the geo strategic value of the corridor. Throughout the course of history, the Chumbi valley has been of critical importance to India, Tibet, and Bhutan. The strategic passes of Nathu la and Jelep la, both of which are located in Sikkim, as well as the pivot points that are located in Bhutan and the Chumbi valley in Tibet, have long served as an arena for India and China to engage in a power play with one another. The trade route between Sikkim in India and Tibet in China is also accessible only through the passes (Nathu la and Jelep la) (ming/going to Siliguri) (Walcott 2010). Therefore, according to the regional geopolitical scenario of the corridor, it has a significant part to play in the overall development of the corridor (Rahmati et al. 2020:5).

However, in the context of the changing geopolitical scenario, China has been trying to make inroads into Southern Asia, the influence of China over the Chumbi Valley region has could impact India. Firstly, it would be easy for China to access India's North Eastern region using Chicken Neck corridor and it would get closer to the periphery of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. China could have a better hold over Tibet from southern geographies too (Bisht 2010).

This study also focuses on other factors that contribute to the corridor's importance such as the roadways that Nepal and Bhutan utilize to access the Arabian Sea for trade purposes through India and Bangladesh. Both Bhutan and Nepal are land locked country sandwiched between China and India and also have a long common socio-cultural, physical and economic linkages and dependence on India. Bhutan can utilize the corridor for to increase its trade in the Indian ocean (Malik 2013 :706).

Ghosh (2016) further states that this corridor is vital for the use of roadway/ railway and other means of transport and communication as it facilitates physical movements and all other activities to the North Eastern states through connecting the Indian mainland. This is also used extensively by Bhutan and Nepal for various economic and social exchanges. This interconnection has also recorded trafficking of human beings, drugs, arms and also other illicit trading.

The study further discusses the factors that have led to the vulnerability of the corridor. The corridor has been a focal point for infiltration of North Eastern India rebels, Nepali Maoist rebels and insurgents from Bangladesh. It is thought to be developing into a safe haven for Indian rebels and other insurgents which triggers regional political stability. The combination of insurgencies with poverty, ethnic conflicts and unstable political situation have brought some newer variety of instabilities in the Eastern Himalaya Region surrounding India (Biswas 2014:1).

Since 1967, the Naxalites, or Maoist rebels, have been active in seven more Indian states: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh. They are believed to have begun in village of Naxalbari in the foothills of Darjeeling district and contiguous of Siliguri town. Over the years it has affected seven more Indian states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa, Bihar, and Andhra Pradesh (Bhaumik 2007:18).

The corridor is also a gateway to the richest biodiversity hotspot of the country. JD Hooker (1854) has mentioned about the vastness and the richness of dense forests. The Neora Valley National Park which is one of the richest biodiversity zones in the eastern region is situated in Kalimpong, a hill district in West Bengal.

Amidst all the security challenges and concerns the study further discusses the great potentials of the corridor that brings about future prospects for India being the main stakeholder. There has been very little intra-regional connectivity and collaboration in South Asia as a whole. India's chicken neck corridor can play a significant role by granting access to use the corridor by Nepal and Bhutan and further develop the regional cooperation. The study aims to examine how India can make full use of the regional dynamics of this corridor. Using the Siliguri-Dooars corridor could greatly improve economic cooperation between Nepal, Bhutan, India, and Bangladesh. As a result, India's bilateral and sub-regional relations with its eastern neighbours may undergo significant shifts.

Kalita (2018) has stated the Act East policy of India has been successful in shifting the balance of global trade and industrial dominance from industrialized to

emerging nations, as seen by the emergence and evolution of political tendencies in the Asian region. The Siliguri corridor could be vital connectivity point in this regard. A game changer for this region could be the commencement of the project known as BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) collectively initiated by these four countries in 2015. The agreement will permit the vehicles of the member states to carry out transportation of cargos and passengers in each other's territories. The main objective of this sub regional agreement is to facilitate economic growth and regional integration in South Asia (Bhattachjee 2014)

“The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, countries of Asia and Europe, and the Asian Highway cooperative project to build the highway networks in Asia could be yet another game changer for the corridor once it is completed connecting Panitanki near Siliguri on the India-Nepal border with Phulbari on the same district on the India-Bangladesh border that will connect to Chandrabanga (India-Bangladesh border), which is in the Cooch Bihar district” (Gosh 2016). A major proposal of sub regional cooperation project the BCIM-EC proposal, seeks to connect the landlocked provinces of Southwest China with eastern India and the Bay of Bengal through northern Myanmar is an interesting proposal for a brand-new land-based and maritime Silk Road. (Uberoi 2016). In this case also the Siliguri corridor will have a vital interconnecting role.

1.2 Understanding Geopolitics

Geopolitics is any power struggle, local features of competition and local action of existing forces in a broader international context. The characteristics of a competitive environment are based on their geography and proximity. How they share their borders is one of the most important variables in the context of international conflicts from the superpowers and the general war, to the spread of international conflicts, to the mysterious notion of peace between the pairs of democracy (Starr 2013: 437).

Boulding (1962) points out that people interact more closely with those closest to them, this is because neighboring regions or parts are considered important to each other

and that is why there have been strong theoretical reasons to be fearful in understanding borders and how they affect international conflicts geographically. These strong theoretical reasons are based on opportunity and determination. In order to understand the geopolitics of international conflicts, the proximity of territories to borders and alliances, the closest and best regions to work together and space play an important role. Although national territories are built and developed within the context of each country, visible links to local, demographic, cultural, economic and historical backgrounds play a significant role. International hurdles have prompted the deployment of a new analytical and policy instrument for international relations known as "sub-national micro-diplomacy," or the quest for a better moniker. Based on an already-existing network of illegal relationships between communities that cross international borders and are connected directly or indirectly to the terms of international cooperation agreements subject to certain conditions, the use of this mode has made formal cooperation between local authorities easier (Starr 2013: 438)

Gray and Sloan (2014: 2-11) determine that the geopolitical conditions of a particular region influence all strategic behaviors. Solan (2017) further argued that with a representation of diplomatic strategy based on lifestyle factors like settlement, migration, agriculture, and the ocean, geopolitics combines the geographically sensitive content of a diplomatic strategic connection with a geographic economic analysis of resources.

In order to reveal the fundamental components of geopolitics as a five-room home, Gray has attempted to challenge the idea of geopolitics. These components are: geophysical resources; location human-skills and cultural resources; experience-past, history, legends, and mental mapping. These sections document the local political impacts sources. Sloan (2017) though, concentrated on how these elements should combine to convey the meaning, saying that "*Geopolitical theory is an attempt to attract attention to the relevance of specific geographical patterns in political history.*"(Solan 2017). This concept concentrates on historic factors and local relationships. The placement of natural resources, the region of economic power, and the lines of communication and their dynamic value as a result of advancements in transportation and weaponry are the three aspects of this geopolitical theory.

In addition, regarding the true character of the nation and how it relates to policy, he made a significant claim: *“The original quality of geopolitics is its goal which means that geopolitics, or geopolitical status exists without the motives and power of states and is not dependent on strategic ideology”*. Although co-operation between different types of military forces is expected as normal, action should be planned and carried out in specific areas as proximity can be linked to military action by chance. First, in understanding the local level of political units, space creates important systems between units that reflect the visible distance and the space between them. The distance is constantly changing because the time and distance between units change with the changing technology of transmission and communication. The inconsistencies in the physical environment between regions may also change in unit systems through associations or unifying units in victory. Second, the site provides an important basis for group division where people live together and are aware of the symbolic significance that is unique to human beings. Location also plays an important role in disputes, space facilitates conflict situations and also serves as a source of conflict, first place is represented by increased opportunity or ease of use and the following is due to the importance of space or in terms of resources, skills, resources or symbolic value of group ownership (Starr and Thomas 2005: 124).

Geopolitics also defines political decisions in matters of border conflict as psychologically boundaries have become a common anthropological theme that plays an important role in distinguishing between one person and another (Grassiani and Swinkels 2014: 7). Geography therefore repeats the physical and human aspects that divide the world. The visible features of the earth's surface represented by mountains, plains, deserts, rivers, lakes and seas remain a major platform for political play. Mountains and deserts are determined to be a hindrance to human activity while rivers and coastal areas are barred from trade with invaders and in order to prevent or control the presence of invaders, borders were set near natural boundaries which eventually led to the creation of natural and ideal boundaries (Sloan 2017: 14).

Starr and Thomas (2015: 123) argue that boundaries and proximity have always been an important aspect of the concept in understanding international conflict and

disaster behavior. However, they also argued that not all boundaries lead to conflict or disaster behavior other boundaries lead to co-operative activities in such situations spaces and the role that plays a major role.

Subra (2012: 9) states that another interesting feature in understanding geopolitics is the role and conduct of the state and the way in which national sovereignty depends on it even though the provinces are not the only players. The state plays an important role in matters of dealing with international or foreign rivals and controls national conflicts as they revolve around the state question and is governed by its political, national, or religious parties and their territorial boundaries and thus their place. The state manifests itself in a soft and equitable manner strictly governed by the rule of law and for this reason it is a game of democracy, voting and negotiation and a vital role. Disputes about a planning project are not resolved by setting up border posts or military bases, or by deploying arms units. What is at stake is not the existence of an empire or its sovereignty over this or that part of its territory, but simply the content of some of the decisions or policies that are unimportant in the areas of planning, economic development, and environmental protection. If local disputes adopt these flexible approaches, it is simply because they often occur in law-abiding states or at least in states where the law plays or has already begun to play a role, as is the case in China, where local conflicts. have proliferated in the last few years, and where public opinion exists, especially because of the internet, which should be considered by the authorities.

The post-Cold War era is also a time of globalization, in which people, goods, and knowledge flow freely. However, borders continue to be crucial in all aspects of security, economics, politics and social media. In the current challenges the frontiers of national sovereignty represent areas of legal power, encompassing the area required in the imagination of an independent state. Boundaries provide for regional security and analysis of regional conflicts but affect inter-regional co-operation (Starr 2013). Kristof (1960: 66) argues that the term geopolitics is often used to denote national expansion policies and local governance. He also argues that geopolitics is the study of geographic factor in international relations that may have an impact on international issues such as border areas and the independence of political units. Sengupta (2019: 62) opposes the

transformation of the global order into a more efficient communication system in which there is a combination of national and economic alliances against traditional alliances.

Regional collaborative efforts such as China's Belt and Road initiative are an economic initiative that helps the Chinese companies increase their growth with projects that are overseas and further helps in expanding into international markets as well as in acquiring strategic assets like technology and natural resources, in keeping with the objectives of foreign policy actions that is intended to achieve in close proximity to economic ties in order to strengthen cooperation between China and all other countries in line with project lines (Sher et al. 2019: 456). Continuing to promote the polar world, the Belt and the road system includes six economic corridors that link other regions and sub-regions such as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor a major project under BRI and also look at a historic event in history. relations between China and Pakistan. This project creates a framework for cooperation on the basis of economic communication and regional cooperation that will continue to bring about and result in positive outcomes in China and Pakistan and in the surrounding regions (Rizvi 2014: 4).

China Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor also plans to provide alternative modes of transport and energy resources and also contributes to the development and stability of the entire region. Other regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have supported major infrastructure projects such as cross-border infrastructure that is very important for regional integration. (Kuroda et al. 2007)

They further pointed that in order to strengthen regional competitiveness through regional cooperation, cross-border infrastructure becomes increasingly important. The idea is to bring about regional development and not just a particular nation. For example, South Asia and Central Asia have lower national infrastructure and cross-border borders compared to East Asia. The infrastructure here covers both hardware and software components. The first reference is to the visual infrastructure components that help to deliver tangible communications such as in the energy industry. Therefore, for a successful regional integration it is important to have cross-border infrastructure that

improves the movement of people, goods, resources and information. Investment in infrastructure has been a catalyst for national economic development and is therefore critical to connecting with various other production groups and markets in the country and thus integrating the region with other nations.

1.2.1 Geopolitics and Natural Resources

In today's world, territorial blocks of independent states are defined as the locations of resources in the earth's geography. Any accusation of resources that has been found on another state's sovereignty is an assault on the sovereignty of the particular state which frequently escalates to confrontation between states. Therefore, resources—whether plentiful or scarce—have been found to be accountable for the conceivable start of skirmishes or war. The unequal distribution of resources found on the surface of the earth, which results in significant access inequities, is the primary cause of resource conflicts that result in geoeconomics rivalries. Some states or other active participants want to obtain access to resources found on the soil of other states, either directly or indirectly (Kurecis 2012).

1.2.2 Geopolitics and Economy

Weede (2016:117) states that geopolitics and economy are interdependent. However, economic expansion disturbs the balance of power among the major nations and hence creates the conditions for great power conflict. Geopolitical factors also affect the economic development of a state. Geopolitics is also important in understanding the extent to which the economic power depends on its control over its territory, on which the illegal activities take place such as human trafficking and drug trafficking as well as other activities such as money laundering that has serious negative consequences for the economic development of that particular territory (Giblin 2013).

1.2.3 Geopolitics and Foreign Policies

Geopolitics plays a crucial role in planning the nation's security policy in the factors based on geopolitics. The geopolitician evaluates these factors examines current spheres of influence and makes an attempt to connect it with the country's policy.

According to the US war department, geopolitics integrates relevant historical facts, geography and political factors to explain and predict how various countries behave within their own borders and with other countries. The most necessary activities of a modern state are the framing of a foreign policy. Each state when organized follows a particular foreign policy. This foreign policy forms and integrate part of the countries domestic policy that has its connection to the environment outside (Huzen 2019: 9).

Solan (2017) argues about geography and strategy by coining a term Geo-strategy that focuses on specific foreign policy of states or where states channel its powers. This concept is a descriptive concept and not a normative one as it does not mention the states where it should project or direct its power and attention. Geopolitical thinking is inherent for the practice of foreign policy although it is not made explicit by the policy makers. The political significance is encircled to the geographical alignments or places (Gokmen 2010:192).

1.3 Corridor: A Theoretical Understanding.

Corridors serves as both connectors and dividers for neighborhoods and districts. They contain both natural and artificial components such as highways, bridges, rail lines and animal trails. The corridor's technical intensity and surrounding density determine the location and type of corridor. Railway tracks pass through the commerce districts of cities and along the sides of towns. Roads that border the neighborhood might have trolleys and light rail. They are therefore designed for pedestrian traffic and to accommodate building frontages. On typical streets, bus lines can travel past community centers. All of these should be landscaped to reinforce their continuity. In low-density areas, the corridor may be the continuous green edge between neighbor hoods, providing long-distance walking and bicycle trails, other recreational amenities and a continuous natural habitat (Duany and Zyberk 1994)

Corridor as a concept is often described as areas of power-line routes, streamside roadways, roads tracts of native habitat, fence-rows in agricultural landscapes, and more. They are associated with a greater and a wider range of longitudinal spaces, greenways,

buffer zones and ecological corridors that have been used as tools for planning and managing land (Marshall 2001).

Corridor as a concept has evolved over a century. There has been broad range of forms and definitions to describe corridors and hence it lacks a standard and a widely accepted definition. Some of the various forms of corridors includes.

Ecological corridor: has been defined as a region connecting small patches of habitats and stepping stones that enables various species of animals to migrate from one region to another travelling through the corridor (Jordan 2000)

Cultural corridor: Corridors that are made by humans by altering the natural environment into corridors spaces by the construction of roads, power lines, shrubbery and buffer zones (Hobbs 1987).

Environment resource corridor: These are naturally occurring corridors that develops into regions where distribution of resources occurs along stream or rivers and across forest areas in limited strip of land (Barret and Bohlen 1991)

Landscape corridor: These corridors are associated with a belt of land or vegetation that are distinguished from the other side of extensive landscape such as fencerow, hedgerow and stream corridor (Barrett and Bohlen 1991).

Healey (2004: 47) defines corridors as linear agglomeration a trip of straight line that is associated with a cluster of economic activities and the people of that particular region forms the physical backbone of transport communication. UNESCAP states that the approach of a corridor can expand from that of linear agglomeration into a tree network and finally into a hub and spoke network of system. The system is defined as a combination of two or more-star network with a central component further connected to other multiple networks around it. Both urban and rural areas are included when it comes to physical corridors that connects the adjoining border regions (USAID 2000).

Corridors can also be distinctive according to the region that they belong to on the basis of their sustainability and the advantages that they have based by their economic

functioning. By bringing in the development and improving the infrastructure that copes with connectivity it is possible to help and recognize the full economic potential that has been vested (Durchslag et al. 1994).

Corridors have emerged as one of the major elements to help facilitate economic and cultural activities in any particular region by facilitating in boosting movements of people and communities from one region to another, hence the corridors act as confluence of social and cultural influence. They help to increase connectivity, competition at the regional and national level of production networks.

There have been various corridors that has been endorsed under variety of regional cooperation initiatives such as the Common Market for East and Southern Africa and South African Development Committee. Regional cooperation initiatives supported by the Asian Developmental Bank that actively works to strengthen and develop regional cooperation across the region has promoted regional corridors in the Asia and the Pacific region. Numerous regional corridors have been identified by the ADB such as the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Economic Cooperation Program, and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program. Efforts has also been put along the maritime region for adopting regional corridors to further promote cooperation one such maritime regional corridor is the Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand Growth Triangle (Sirvastava 2011: 258)

Duany and Zyberk (1994:19) opines that corridors are crucial component of New Urbanism since it has a fundamentally municipal characteristic. They play a vital role in providing connectivity and mobility to the villages, towns, districts and neighborhoods to most frequently used public spaces in the region.

Whebell (1969) has defined corridors as a linear pattern of emerging towns connected by developing transportation routes. It is defined by a particular geographical region that is subjugated primarily by the extensive blend of economic activities such as trade, transportation, and tourism, normally featured by highways, railways and ports that link the major economic hubs with the demand zones within a country or between two or

more countries, the corridor comprises not just the highways but also the area around the highway that uses it. He further explains corridors as geographical region that is associated with various economic activities such as trade, transportation and tourism, normally features by highways, railways and ports that links the major economic hubs with the other demand zones within the country or two or more countries. He further states that understanding the continuity of the corridor can be represented in five stages which are as follows:

Subsistence agriculture: This stage is marked by initial occupancies where the people moving in an area for the first time makes assessment of the natural environment, accessibility is a predominant factor therefore drainage lines that occur naturally are generally accessed as tracks for movements, and most advantageous locations or paths in the natural terrain are used for settlement purposes

Commercial exchange: This stage is marked by an increase in the land settlement and an increase in agricultural commodities creating demands and further leading to improvements in business along with the development of towns along the routes where commercial activities begin to develop. It is challenging to pin point precisely when regional system transitions from a subsistence to a commercial agriculture stage. These changes seem to appear in the form of transportation advancement that rises the local, regional and economic interaction, and a level of entrepreneurial activity that is more pervasive and sophisticated, as shown by the founding of banks in particular, all seem to be part of a larger syndrome of changes.

Rail transport dominance: In this stage efforts has been made to lower the cost of transportation, mainly in town areas in order to invest and endorse in railways to connect through the developed towns for the transfer of raw materials and advancing manufacturing industries.

The early automobile period: This stage unlike the previous one is associated with an increased use of motor cars that emphasis on the use of road transport in which roads play a vital role connecting major towns further promoting economic growth with

an extension towards retailing and services. That further fuels an expansion in urbanization and sharp rise in the use of land for recreational purposes.

Rapid transit and metropolitanism: The fourth stage are marked by region wide dominance of metropolitan areas. In this stage the economic disparities between the rural and urban areas have been more pronounced. The rural areas dependence on the urban areas is essentially complete. This stage is also marked with a rapid growth of the urban centers merged with the formation linear megapolis.

Whebell (1969) in his theory on corridor has described an evolutionary system of urban development of the corridor that has been based on the differences between locations, geological, economical, infrastructural and cultural aspects, amassing of capital and technological means that flourishes the locations which leads to a structure of more or less urbanized and advanced corridors instead of central places. The significance of the location differences appears in three postulates which are based on geographical differences in physical surface and land factors of production, geographical differences in state of technology and human development based on trial and error and following the principle of last effort. The *first postulates* he states is that the surface of the earth is highly irregular and to this respect of the physical surface of the earth, the factors of production mainly fertility of the soil and the distribution of minerals depends on that. *Secondly*, he states that the innovations and the changes in the technology affects the character and intensity of the usage of the land by the man, although it does not occur simultaneously over wide regions but it disseminates from their location of origin at varying rates. *Lastly*, he opines that the achievement of the humans is the result of the choices made by the humans, both successful and mistaken, based on the principle of minimum work causing fixed capital and socioeconomic structure to remain passive.

Collins (1965: 242) argues about the concept of linear cities and the unplanned linear growth he had noticed. He further states that the linear growth of an ordinary village prevalent along the road since the ancient times represents the linear urban form that is the backbone along which the habitation, commercial enterprise and mercantilism are located and it is along this line that we see the natural pattern of growth of the urban

regions designed to meet this natural propensity towards linear and urban development. According to him the concept of 'linear city' and the 'corridor' seems to be interchangeable. He further explains linear city as a city that has been formed and expanded along a line, generally represented by roads, rails, pipes and wires that facilitates transportation of people, goods and services. Its inner system is built for maximum efficiency, and all of its components are easily accessible to one another and consume the same urban amenities. Although the linear city designs have never won popular support among expert planners, it has strangely enough been the natural pattern of growth of the urban regions.

Phleps (2017) argues that the morphology and functioning of corridors have been related to the developments in transportation technologies such as water, rail and road. The corridors also feature multidimensional vicinities that provide the designated development region a distinct identity and an improved standard of living and employment.

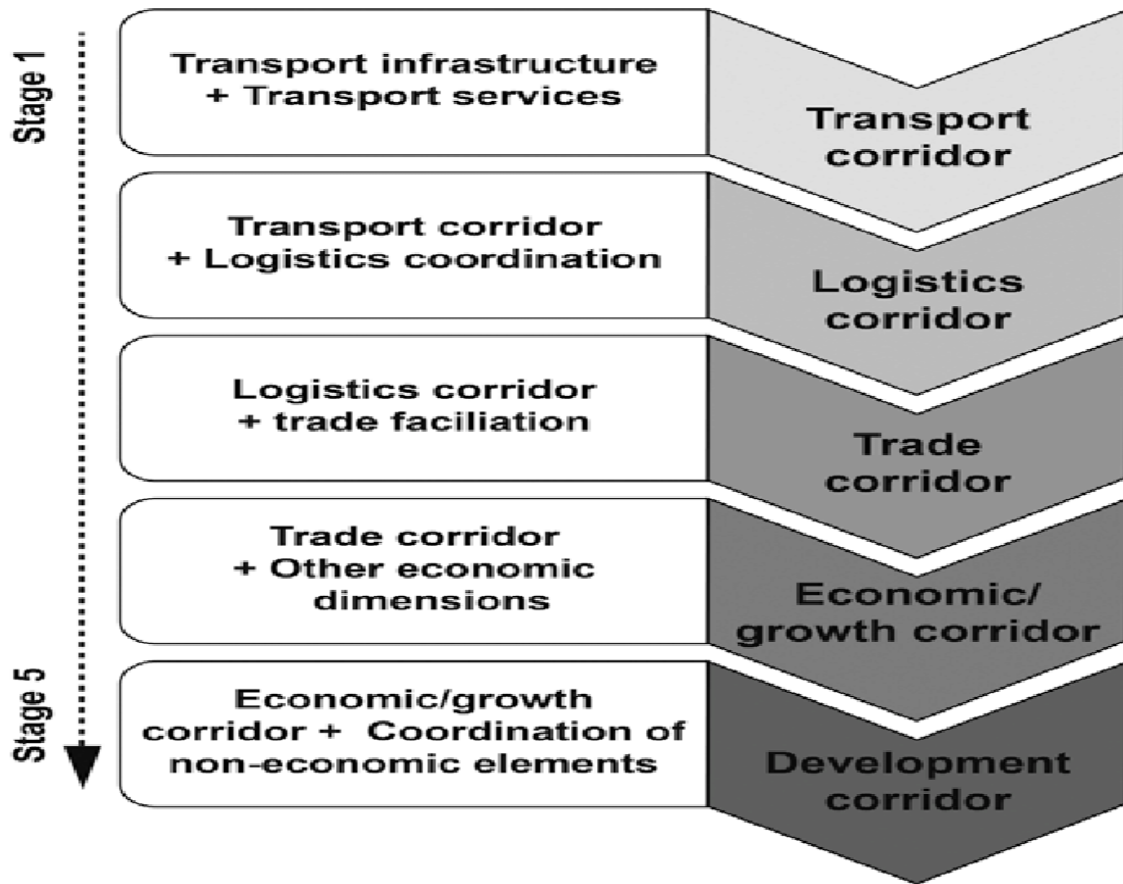
Forman (2019) has talked about two types of corridors mainly the *Natural corridor and the human-made corridor*. The natural corridors are those corridors such as stream or the animal trails which are generally curvy and in contrast the human made corridors are associated with roads, hedgerows which are often straight. These straight corridors are generally associated with several habitat types some of which are less suitable for wildlife. However, the linearization of the land by the human corridors has accelerated both the movements of humans as well as the wildlife.

Hobbs (1887) describes natural corridors as a characteristic feature of the environment that occurs naturally, such as rivers or streams flanked by forests running through an existing recurrent route. On the other hand, he describes man-made corridors as those that have been progressively modified over time by a variety of human activities, such as building of roads, power lines and railroads.

According to the Asian Developmental Bank the conception of corridor comprises several but correlated theoretical models for organising physical and socioeconomic responses to promote the development of an area. These interconnected models can be

viewed as the progression of corridors from *the (stage 1) of transport corridor (stage 1), to (stage 2) of logistics corridor, to (stage 3) of transport and trade facilitation corridor and (stage 4) of economic or growth corridor*. The evolution of corridor through these several phases takes place at varying rates and in varied ways that is depended upon various factors and stakeholders which includes public or private investments that includes domestic bound investors and foreign direct investment (FDI) and policies that favors small and medium industrial enterprises and logistics companies (Srivastava 2011: 285).

Figure 1. 1 Stages of corridor Development



Source: Stages of corridor development, Galvez Nogales, 2014.

1.3.1 Transport Corridor

De and Iyengar (2014) state that transport corridors are sets of routes that connect various centers of economy within and across the nation. This type of corridor development appears to be straightforward. The transportation routes have evolved to facilitate the socioeconomic development activities for the purpose of improving the movement of goods and people, serving both as a transport and a trade corridor. This transport corridor further develops into a sub national region or a cross-border region corridor.

The transport corridor supports trade flows and economic activities along a specific route such as a domestic one like India's Golden Quadrangle which links Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, and Chennai and the other example can be of a cross-border or a regional one such as the Siliguri Dooars corridor that connects and serves Bangladesh,

Indian states of Sikkim and Assam as well as the landlocked nations of Bhutan and Nepal (World Bank, 2005).

The World Bank generally refers to transport and commerce corridors or freight corridors that ultimately leads to the creation of an economic corridor (Hope and Cox 2015).

Hence, transport corridor acts as a transfer point with a basic motive to enable movement of goods and people stimulating economic activity and this economic activity will further enhance infrastructural development that is dependent on number of factors that includes the demand for and accessibility of raw materials, the contribution of transportation expenses to the final price of the product, the accessibility of markets and the obtainability of the labor workforce, etc. The requirement to create activities close to infrastructure may be less crucial in heavily populated areas (ADB 2014).

The transport corridor is also associated with physical and a functional dimension. The transport corridor may have different arrangements. However, they have a general transfer point that connects the same end points. The routes mostly facilitate interconnection of transport services and the end points are gateways to the immediate hinterlands to enter or exit by using the corridors (Arnold 2006: 13).

Fanou and Wang (2017:1) have argued that most of the *land locked* countries are heavily dependent on their nearest neighboring countries for transit facilities and transportation of goods to the nearest ports. *Landlocked* can be defined as a situation in which the particular region or the country lacks direct access to the sea and basic transportation and service networks causing them difficulties connecting to world markets at a very long distance with uncooperative transit procedures. The lack of basic infrastructural amenities further leads to an increased transportation and trade costs that reduces the overall global trade which in turn affects the economic growth.

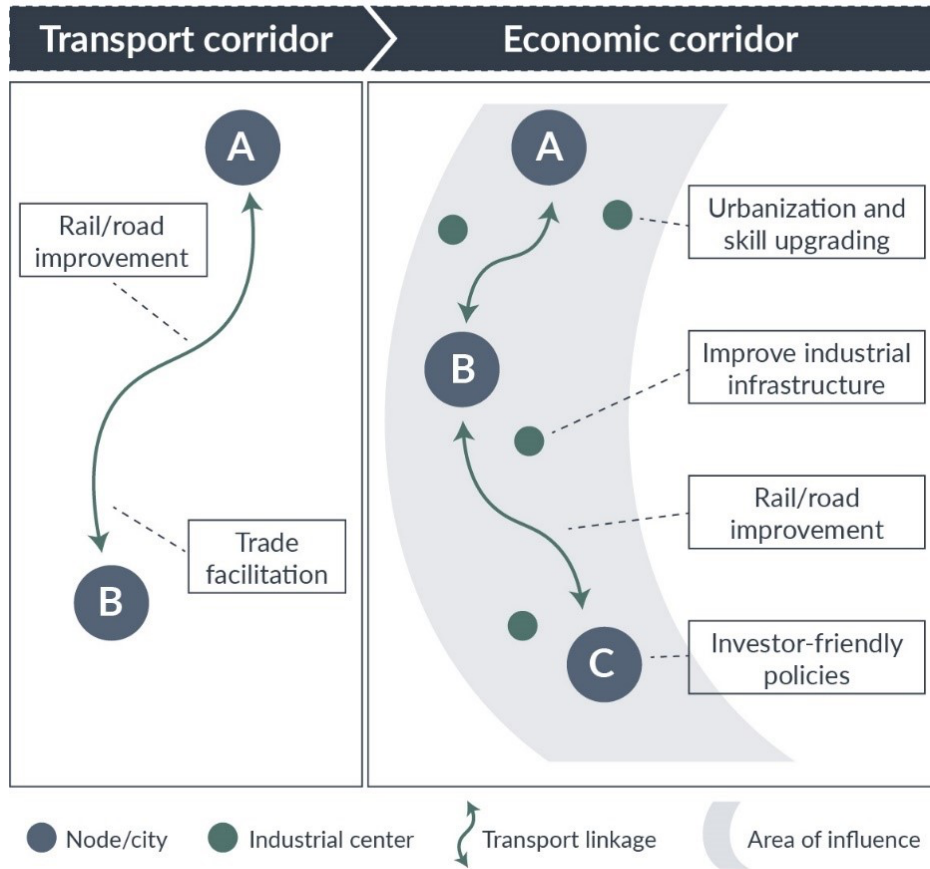
The problems that the landlocked countries face is basically the long distance that they have to cover from the sea to the transportation facilities that is associated with a very poor network.

The UNCATD has estimated that on average landlocked countries spend approximately twice more of their earnings from their exports mostly for the transportation and insurances services hence in this case the transport corridors can be beneficial in reducing transportation cost and provide a better trading facility particularly for the developing landlocked countries (Nogales 2008).

Arnold (2005) argues that the transport corridors give landlocked nations access to the coast via one or more transit nations, they further help in regional development by offering logistics and transportation to the cities and nations along the route. This can be seen in the case of two landlocked countries of Nepal and Bhutan, how Siliguri-Dooars corridor plays a vital role providing transportation and logistics services for trade corridors. The development of a corridor also further focuses on the overall social development, eradication of poverty and to bring about employment opportunities (Hope and Cox 2015).

The figure below shows the difference between Transport corridor and Economic corridor. Here it shows that the main purpose of a transport corridor is to facilitate sets of routes such as roadways and railways from one region to another for enhancing transportation of goods and movement of people. On the other hand, an Economic corridor is not just associated with transport linkages and trade facilitate. But it further connects important economic industrial centers and nodal cities. The economic corridor further enhances the overall area in the corridor region by promoting urbanization and bringing up infrastructural development.

Figure 1. 2 Difference between Transport corridor and Economic corridor



Source: "Repaving the ancient Silk Routes," PwC, June 2017.

1.3.2 Logistic Corridor

Banomyong (2008) defines logistic corridors as physical corridors that plays a significant role in easing the movement of related information, the institutional framework for logistics, transportation, structural and legitimate circumstances for conveyance.

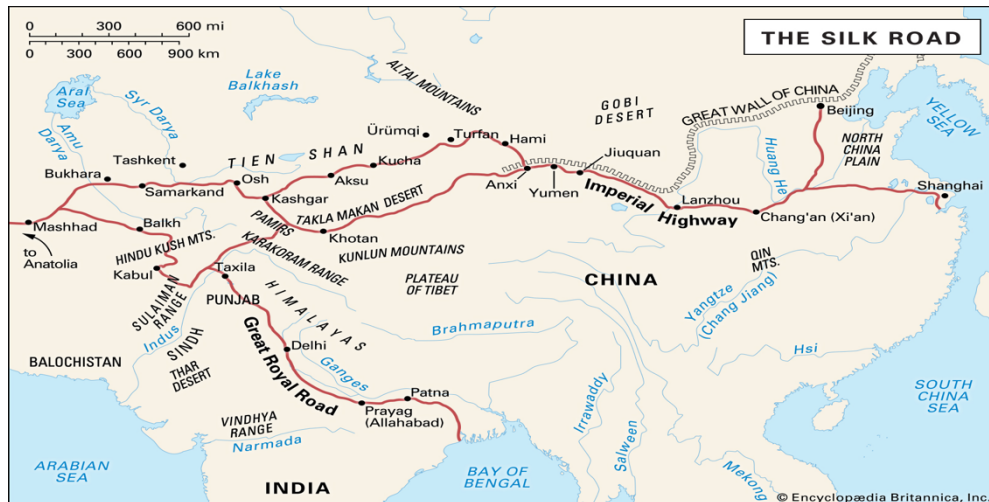
The main objective of logistic corridor is focus on trade facilitation but also on the reduction in the trade barriers that will further improve the logistics services along with an increase in the competitiveness (Hope and Cox 2015). The logistics corridors are primarily concerned with connecting the hubs of logistics centers in various locations. These hubs are connected to various transit systems the enable the provision of logistics services like processing, customs allowance and warehousing facilities.

Contrary to other type of corridors logistics corridors needs functional structures in abridging the procedures. This functional framework aids in removing customs bottlenecks that affect all other corridors.

1.3.4 Trade Corridor

Trade corridors are not a recently developed phenomenon, over the years they have been used for both transportation and trade for many years. One of the best examples of a trade route that has contributed significantly to the socioeconomic development of the entire region with the paths that crossed is the historic Silk Road. The route has played a significant role in bridging two great civilization- China and the Roman Empire and a wide geographic region on either side of this path has seen the interchange of ideas and commerce between these two empires (Keser 2015)

Map 1.1 Map of Ancient Silk Road



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silk-Road-trade-route>

The history of trade corridors has its foundation laid with the Silk Road that began in modern day China and ran through Africa to Middle East and Europe. The Silk Road gives us an understanding that trade corridors since the ancient times has been used as medium to exchange goods and commodities and also serve as an intercontinental method for transporting human services and an integral medium for economic prosperity.

The trade corridor is usually synchronized with the national or a regional body, as they play a vital role of economic integration among the nations as well as between regional trading blocs around the world, like the European Union, The North American states which gives us an understanding of the importance of regional body integration. The trade corridor facilitates not just intrastate economic development but also interstate trading relations (Global Trade corridors).

There has been huge initiative of trade corridor all across the region and the world. More than 100 initiatives and research focused on trade and transit corridors, as well as several related projects, have all been funded by the World Bank alone. The majority of the corridors in South Asia have received funding from two sources, namely state policy banks like the China Exim and China Development Bank and the commercial branches of multilateral funders like the World Bank Group's International Finance Corporation. According to World Bank estimates from the year 2014, the transportation sector alone would need to be improved in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka for investments to total between US\$408 and US\$685 billion at 2010 prices (World Bank 2018).

However, there are many projects like the road project in Nepal the Katmandu-Kulekhani-Hetauda Tunnel Highway that has faced a lot of difficulties in terms of financing and the status of the project still appears to be uncertain. However, it is indeed apparent that China has set aside significant funding for the One Belt One Road initiative to support a number of infrastructure projects throughout South Asia. Additionally, China has pledged more than US\$ 45 billion to build infrastructure projects as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (World Bank 2018).

“Trade corridors are also associated with international gateways such as ports, airports, and land borders as the gateways further provide an intramodal or intermodal transfer as they are included to be a part of the corridor and also the capacity of gateways and the quality of service can affect the cost of transportation services” (Kunaka and Carruthers 2014).

Nogales (2008) argues that a trade corridor in general, lacks a widely accepted definition. According to him, a trade corridor can be regarded as a transportation route that aims to boost trade flows by connecting one or more nearby nations or by providing access to landlocked nations. By reorganizing and streamlining trade and customs operations and trade policy, trade corridor emphasizes removing barriers that obstruct the effortless movement of people and transportation of goods. Examples of such hurdles include incompatible customs information technology, the absence of adequate transnational law, operational challenges brought on by inconsistent freight, customs, and transportation regulations, and underdeveloped cross-border link networks.

Arnold (2006) asserts that it's critical to distinguish between the functions that distinct corridors perform for domestic, international, and transportation traffic. He distinguishes four different kinds of corridors: national, bilateral, multilateral, multimodal, and intermodal.

- *National trade corridor* is one that operates within the domestic transportation system and transports goods to or from the country's borders or international gateways.
- *Bilateral trade corridors* are designed for the transfer of goods between two nations that consent the use of each other's international entry points, including border checkpoints.
- *Multilateral trade corridors* are meant for the transportation of freight across three or more nations with at least one of them serving as a transit nation.
- A *multimodal corridor*, has parallel routes that uses different modes and hence it is more difficult to manage. The distinctions between single mode, multimodal, and intermodal corridors are largely artificial given that the majority of international trade corridors are intermodal and comprise parallel routes using many modes of transportation. The pathways that cross borders can be regarded as multimodal as border checkpoints frequently serves as hub for changing between transport modes regardless if they follow the same route.

- *Intermodal corridors* are difficult to manage and this attempts to restrict the corridor to just one mode as this the would help reduce the management's efficacy and result in incomplete or worse, unsuccessful initiatives (Arnold 2006).

1.3.5 Economic Corridor

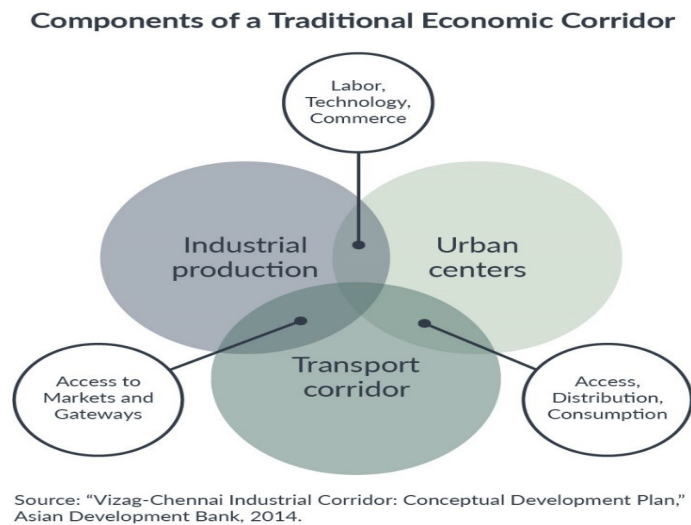
The economic corridor approach has gained attention and momentum with the Asian Development Bank's funding for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The GMS program has improved the transport connection in the entire subregion that has been linked to the East-West, North-South, and Southern key corridors, that has been one of the most significant accomplishments of the program. The strategy that has been adopted by the GMS program is to focus its investment in the transportation sector, energy and telecommunications in the region.

Banomyong (2008) opines that one of the essential characteristics for identifying economic corridors is their capacity to draw in investment and increase commercial activities in the region and further bring about economic development. According to this approach economic corridor emphasizes in infrastructure development along with the economic opportunities that includes trade and investment and other socioeconomic development. The Asian Development Bank has defined economic corridors by giving three sets of features. *Firstly*, an economic corridor is related with a small geographical space straddling a transport artery such as a road, rail, or canal and *secondly*, an economic corridor focuses on bilateral initiatives rather than multilateral initiatives. Thirdly an economic corridor emphasizes on strategic nodes at border crossings between the two countries.

Brunner (2013) opines that “economic corridor connects economic agents along defined geography providing essential connections between economic nodes or hubs.” They play a crucial role in regional integration and development. However, this mainly depends on the characteristics. Last but not least, the corridor places a strong emphasis on development planning to ensure that the development of infrastructure is successful. With an annual investment in regional cooperation and integration of at least \$2 billion, the

Asian Development Bank has a significant stake in the effective deployment of corridor development idea.

Figure 1. 3 Components of Traditional Economic corridor



Source: Asian Development Bank, 2014

The SASEC region of South Asia has to be developed in a more geographically balanced manner and substantially efficient in employment generation in order to address its limited integration into the global trading system as it lacks appropriate production networks and scales economies as well as it faces challenges with agglomeration and information coordination. In the past ten years, the four SASEC members—Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal—have implemented investment measures and policies to reestablish cross border and transit ties (Bunner 2013).

Economic corridors are extremely significant for the growth of a particular region as they play a crucial role in linking economies across regions. They reduce transportation costs both locally and internationally, expand access to global markets, and enhance the socio-economic status of those residing along the corridor. As a result, economic corridors are essential as a key factor in determining how economically integrated a particular region is (Vickerman 2002).

They foster regional integration by encouraging regional and global trade. In the age of globalization, the economic corridors have developed into crucial pillars of regional economic cooperation. Economic corridor, according to the Asian Development Bank, is a network that links businesses along a specific route. Corridors growth seems to have promoted regional development with the development of trade hubs and gateways and the associations with investors from international sectors in the private and public partnerships financed by World Bank and China have also led to the influence in the plans and policies that is associated with the development of the corridor as a whole (Dannenberg et al. 2018).

1.4 Regional Integration Through Corridors

Srivastav (2011) opines that regional corridor play a vital role as an important part to implement initiatives for cooperation among regions. The regional cooperation efforts have distinctly acknowledged regional corridors. These corridors are associated with enhanced transport road and rail network that promotes connectivity across the countries, and further increases economy and overall development of the region. Through this procedure the evolution of corridors passes through various stages of its improvements form providing trading assistance to providing logistical facilities.

He goes on to provide another illustration in the form of growth poles or transportation corridors. These economic activity hubs serve as the growth poles that distribute growth geographically within a regional metropolitan system, resulting in the development of the region. But this entire process is not balanced, with the centre receiving the advantages initially and the periphery integrating only afterwards. In this context of regional urban planning, transportation corridors are an accumulation of service flows and infrastructures of various modes, and their development is linked to increased urbanization and urban development. Transportation plays a significant role in enhancing the value of the poles. He adds that these regional corridors have been extensively studied in urban planning and the spatial organization of transportation in the form of growth poles or transport corridors.

In Urban planning the usage of the term ‘regional’ is dissimilar from the meaning of regional cooperation as the former is used in a domestic context whereas the latter is used globally throughout the sovereign nations. In comparison to subnational urban planning, the cross-border association results in significant disparities in stakeholders, policy space, and institutional choices for joining together and forming organizations or coordinating actions (Marrian 2001).

Urban planners commonly compare corridors to a primary service channel that may carry a variety of engineering services, or to a human arm with veins and arteries, bones (referred to as "spines"), elbows, and hands (referred to as "nodes"). The corridors pass through urban or interurban areas, connecting significant occupational hubs, and contain dense populations as well as a variety of land uses, including a significant number of homes, retail establishments, social, cultural, and recreational amenities. This suggests that there are quite distinct concerns, groups of people, and interests than in regional (cooperation) corridors. (Srivastava 2011).

The major components of the regional corridors are its commercial hub centers and transportation linkages between them. Apart from these other major components includes regions surrounding the corridor proximity and other smaller hubs that may be located some far-off places and not between them. It is necessary for these commercial hubs to be significant enters of economic activity so that the corridors can have some economic foundation for future economic growth (Srivastav 2011).

The regionality of the corridor and its area of control or the width serves as the foundation for the development of a regional corridor. However, as most corridors are connected to international borders, they also play a highly important role in the nation's national security. Hence this significance of a corridor is the result of a combination of several elements.

Griffiths (2007) opines that “corridors often lie between two or more sovereign states, though sometimes it divides one other state into two parts”. He further argues that access of these corridors are manifestations of ‘grand’ geopolitics, the state pursuing

access must extend its authority over the corridor by an international convention in order to achieve efficient access, as not having access would leave certain countries landlocked, secluded or without having an accessibility or connectivity to presumed to usual pathways. Like the Siliguri Dooars corridor of India - one of the most strategically located corridor of South Asia- which can be used as an access point to the Indian Ocean via India-Bangladesh and then Bay of Bengal. The Corridor is also beneficial for the land locked neighboring countries i.e., Bhutan and Nepal.

In addition to developing ties to the East, Central Asia has long-standing relationships to the West that are currently in a weakened state. In addition to expanding its role as a provider of trade and services in both ways, particularly to the major industrial and manufacturing hubs of East Asia, Central Asia can develop into a transit region between East and West.

Europe is geographically and economically divided between the North and the South, but Asia is much more geographically and economically divided into the Eastern, Southeastern, Southern, and Central-Western regions, where deserts, highlands, weather, and diversity in culture and history play more significant roles than in other parts of the world. That emphasizes the distance between the many subregions of Asia. As a result, integration is more expensive. Asia's economic networks are more tightly knit and centered around centers, and the limited long-distance connections between these hubs. In order to establish economic corridors and networks in developing centers, Asia will need to focus its efforts there while also strengthening and hardening existing long-distance connections (i.e., increase in network connectivity) (Rahman et al. 2012)

“The South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) program's member nations, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, have the potential to become an Asian trading and investment powerhouse given their resources and advantageous location” (Dubey 2008:7). Without considerable interregional cooperation, the economies of South Asian nations have developed significantly over the past 20 years. According to several analyses, South Asian nations could potentially see substantially higher growth if

regional economic contact increases (Srinivasan 2006). Others call for greater interaction among the SASEC countries for enhancement of trade and investment (Dubey 2008: 7).

According to De and Iyengar (2014), India has been placed uniquely in South Asia because it links the majority of the nations in the region and plays a crucial role in bridging East and West Asia. The significance of the transport corridor in the region and the significant opportunities for trade, investment, and economic growth in the region—particularly when regional integration is low in the region—have been identified by studies like the ADB-supported SAARC regional multimodal transport study (SRMTS), the BIMSTEC transport logistics study (BTLS), and the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure development project, endorsed by UNESCAP in 1992 and including plans for the Asian Highway. According to De (2014), connectivity has become essential for regional and international economic cooperation in South Asia.

Walcott (2010: 74) argues that “passes serves either as corridors of conflict or commerce”. Establishing transportation infrastructure to improve control over the land, particularly in regions near political boundaries, entails the extension of economic and military power. Predominantly in underdeveloped and contentious areas, roads have significant ecological, economic, political, cultural, and demographic effects.

Semple (1901: 191) opines that any city or a state that is located on the foot lands or the plains draws its support from the mountains, as it is located on the line of travel that always skirts the base of a mountain range, at the point where this is intersected by a transverse route of communication across the highlands. “The greater fertility of the plains makes for a larger centre of population, the intersection of trade routes ensures commercial activity, hence such points offer conditions for large and flourishing cities, especially if railroads follow the two lines indicated” (Semple 1901:191). Hence in terms of connectivity through corridors in the perspective of geopolitics, Mountain passes play a very crucial role. Like for example Peshawar in Pakistan depends more upon the *Khaibar Pass* and its connections thereby with central Asia than upon the Indus river. Kabul, which commands the western entrance to this route, and lies on the great thoroughfare through the *Pass of Bamian* to Russian Turkistan, is one of the keys of

India, while Kandahar, the other, occupies the point where all the routes of western and southern Afghanistan converge for the descent through the Bolan pass to the Sindh. Where mountains follow a semi-circular course, the routes over their passes must tend to converge on the inner side.

The western border of the Chumbi Valley is marked by the passes of Jelep la and Nathu la, as well as a number of further distant openings in the north. The history of this area is primarily notable for the passages via the Chumbi valley. Teesta in Sikkim and Ammo Chu in western Bhutan functioned as important trading routes. The traditional trade route from Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, over the Natula Pass, which connects to Rangpo (running south), Kalimpong, and Siliguri in the Indian base in the lowlands, is also a path that once connected Gangtok to Tibet (Walcott 2010:68)

In addition to Nathu La and Jelep La, additional mountain passes in South Asia are crucial in the context of corridors for economic and geopolitical regional interconnections. For example, the Zoji La pass is a crucial route connecting Srinagar on one side with Kargil and Leh on the other. This route passes via NH1D. The passes such as Rohtang Pass, road link between Kulu, Laul and Spiti valley holds a great economic importance as it is a great tourist attraction. In the similar manner Lipu Lekh and Mangsha Pass in Uttarakhand are crucial for the pilgrims going to Kailash Mansarovar. The passes in Arunachal Pradesh such as Bomdi La and Dipher Pass holds strategic importance as they are important trade route, the former connecting Arunachal Pradesh to Lhasa and the latter between India and Myanmar that is opened throughout the year. Hence apart from the strategic relevance mountain passes also plays a vital role in terms of economic connectivity through corridors (Walcott 2010: 68). De (2014) further analyzes the linkages between the economic corridor and regional integration, the economic corridor will intensify vertical intra-industry trade and the possibility of more production sharing arrangements may be realized by the nation.

1.5 New Regionalism

With this brief theoretical understanding of the concepts of corridor which revolve around the aspects between politics and territory at the international forefront, the scope and the geopolitical relevance of corridor that hold both national and international importance in terms of connectivity, cooperation, trade, culture and security with its neighboring countries can be studied from the perspective of 'New Regionalism theory'. It is a set of new theories propounded by scholars like Bjorn Hettne, James Mittleman, Michael Shatz, Andras Inrotoi and Sandra Maclean. By embracing elements that were previously limited to "old regionalism," new regionalism broadens the scope of "old regionalism."

According to Soderbaum and Shaw (2003), "the theories of New Regionalism represent the first systematic attempt to bring together key notions of regionalism". According to the new regionalism theory, regionalism is a complex, all-encompassing, and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs across a number of sectors and is frequently driven by many state, market, societal, and foreign actors both inside and outside of formal regional organizations. New Regionalism remains associated with the deepest level of integration and growing linkages with the developed and the developing countries which would also help in achieving both trade and increased productivity. This theory is far-reaching in cooperating with the society, culture and the economy apart from political and security issues within its area. Its focus is more on the functional and economic regions thereby eroding the significance of state boundaries and restructuring the process of cooperation and regional integration.

According to Wheeler (2002), new regionalism places more emphasis on physical planning, urban design, and sense of place, and it takes a more activist or normative stance on the part of planners. It also has a holistic point of view that integrates planning specialties with environmental, equity, and economic goals. The adoption of new regionalist ideas is expected to occur gradually through the growth of social capital, institutions, collaborations, and incentive and mandate structures among current levels of government rather than through top-down regional government. New regionalism is a multidimensional process that brings together a diverse set of actors. The civil society

and the non-state actors play a very important role. Sub regionalism is the emerging practice of new regionalism where we see that borderlands are the theme of interaction, connectivity is revived and rebuilt, and markets are integrated and expanded which will led to economic restructuring and greater specialization in production.

In recognition of the significance of regional integration in South Asia, the “South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)” summit that took place in Islamabad in 2004 made the decision to expand transport, travel, and interaction ties throughout the region. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided financial and technical support throughout the entirety of the “SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport Study (SRMTS)”, which was completed in 2006. It is possible to begin the process of regional integration in South Asia by first developing regional infrastructure in the form of economic corridors. This will not only improve international and national transportation, but it will also encourage industrialization in the surrounding area. The Mekong-India Economic Corridor (MIEC) and the India-Malaysia-Thailand Trilateral Highway (IMTTH) are both examples of cross-regional economic corridors that connect South Asia and Southeast Asia. Other examples include the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC), which is a national economic corridor with regional associations. Another example is the India-Malaysia-Thailand Trilateral Highway. It has been demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) would benefit from enhanced international transportation infrastructure, and that enhanced connectivity would play a role in the alleviation of poverty in the GMS. Nonetheless, one of the difficulties in establishing corridors that are economically developed is that their accomplishment heavily depends on the policies, their reforms, institutional development and governance. Here is where regional cooperation plays an important role. For example, significantly larger cooperation among the regions would effectively connect landlocked nations such as Nepal and Bhutan by connecting them to the rest of the South Asian region (Rahman et al. (2012)

The first Chapter gives a brief theoretical understanding of the corridors the second chapter deals with evolution of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor and its relevance.

1.6 Rational and Scope of The Study

The study aims to examine the various potentials the Siliguri corridor holds for India. It delves into how the landlocked countries (Nepal and Bhutan) can use the corridor. It also examines how the corridor can be made to use as an economic corridor which will add to the development of the region and boost economic relations and ties with the eastern neighboring countries and further enhance India's Act East Policy.

1.7 Research Questions

What are the historical, strategic, physical and economic- environmental geneses of Siliguri Corridor?

1. How the Siliguri Corridor has emerged as a crucial connecting point to the geographies around and more critical within the Indian federal framework?
2. What are the larger issues that make the Siliguri corridor a core geographical point?
3. What are the local and regional dynamics of this corridor?
4. What have been proven and unproven vulnerabilities of this corridor?
5. How can the Siliguri corridor play a crucial role for India's "Act East Policy"?
6. Where does this corridor figure in the larger dynamics of sub-regionalism, regionalism and trans-Asian situations?
7. If the Siliguri corridor is made an Economic Corridor how will it bring changes in India's north east regions?

1.8 Hypotheses

- a) The influence and inter-play of complex set of variables tend to keep the Siliguri Corridor always vulnerable and unstable.
- b) The Siliguri Corridor if brought under the wider cooperation dynamics of sub-regionalism and Act East Policy could transform the development and connectivity dynamics of the region.

1.9 Research Methodology:

The study will be both descriptive and empirical to examine the geopolitical relevance of India's Siliguri corridor. The study will take into account both sources i.e., primary and secondary. The former would include documents that are officially published by the government and the latter would include journals, books, articles and newspaper reports.

CHAPTER 2

EVOLUTION OF THE SILIGURI-DOOARS CORRIDOR AND ITS RELEVANCE

2.1 Introduction

The fundamental objective of this chapter is to provide an overview of how the Siliguri-Dooars corridor also known as the ‘Chicken Neck Corridor’ evolved and grew its relevance in becoming a vibrant corridor in terms of its geopolitical relevance. The ‘Siliguri-Dooars Corridor’ in India is one such corridor that is of great strategic importance and holds huge potential. This narrow strip of land of 60 km is located in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of West Bengal that connect the rest of its north-eastern states to the Indian mainland and is flanked by the international borders of Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh.

Map 2.1 Map of Chicken Neck Corridor



Source: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/politics/chickens-neck/articleshow/59424396.cms>

Middleton (2007) states the chicken neck corridor to be a constricted corridor that eventually developed to be a critical chokepoint with an enormous volume of resources and people moving through the corridor. He further opines these chokepoints as sites that constrict and choke the flow of information, body, or goods due to their usual and anthropogenic traits. Interestingly what happens in these regions affects far beyond and the forces of globalization are powerfully exposed in these kinds of chokepoints.

2.2 History of the Siliguri Dooars Corridor

The birth of Siliguri, a subdivision of Darjeeling district, as a corridor came into prominence after India's independence from British rule which led to the partition of India and Pakistan by drawing the international boundary by the Radcliff commission and the creation of East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh). However there have been a series of events that have built the ground for this entire process. The chicken neck corridor stretches from the Himalayas of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and the lower plains of Terai areas of North Bengal. Siliguri and Dooars as a corridor became a neck of land connecting the Indian mainland to the north-eastern states of India, that soon became a transit spot and an important junction with a geostrategic relevance.

Moktan (2004) in his compendium of documents has stated that, the frontiers of Sikkim and Darjeeling was continuously changing. Over the period of hundred years, time and again it changed ownership and its sovereignty due to the signing of various agreements and treaties.

The early political history of Darjeeling states that the district was part of Sikkim. In the year 1706, the now Kalimpong district was lost to the Bhutanese from the Raja of Sikkim. The Raja of Sikkim and the Gorkha's who had seized power in Nepal were constantly engaged in warfare and in 1780s Nepal invaded Sikkim and annexed Teesta as well as the Terai region. In the meantime, war broke out between the East India Company and Nepal (Anglo-Nepal war 1814) which resulted in the defeat of Nepal and the signing

of the ‘Treaty of Sugauli’ in the year 1816¹, according to this treaty All of the land taken from the Raja of Sikkim had to be returned to Nepal. In the year 1817 with the ‘Treaty of Titaliya’² the British returned the entire country between the Mechi and the Teesta to the Raja of Sikkim and guaranteed his sovereign rights, having established Sikkim as a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan (Moktan 2004).

Thus, the intervention of the British was critical in preventing the Gorkhas from taking away all these areas as their outlying province and in retaining Sikkim including the present district of Darjeeling, west, and south of Teesta as a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan (O’Malley1902).

Two decades subsequently signing the Treaty of Titaliya, conflict emerged between Sikkim and the Nepal frontier, and the matter was referred to the then governor-general under the terms of the treaty. Captain Lloyd and J.W. Grant were dispatched to settle the dispute in 1828. It was during this time that Lloyd and J.W Grant were fascinated by the geographic location and beauty of Darjeeling for the first time. The Britishers were also attracted because of the commercial and strategic location of Darjeeling as it could emerge as the entrepot of the trans-Himalayan trade with neighboring countries of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet (Chakrabarty 2005).

Wangyal (2002) states that the East India Company had been looking for a sanatorium hill station for its employees and the European residents of eastern India. Calcutta the then capital of British India had no hill station, therefore, a hill station in eastern India was necessary. Lloyd emphasized the importance of securing the position, as well as the benefits that would ensconce all of the country's trade and as a position of crucial strategic value directing the gateway of Nepal and Bhutan.

“Lloyd was thus assigned to negotiate terms with the Raja of Sikkim for the handover of Darjeeling in exchange for a monetary or a land comparable. As a result, in

¹ Treaty of Sugauli- After the Anglo-Nepalese war that took place between 1814 and 1816, on March 4, 1816, the East India Company and Guru Gajaraj Mishra signed a treaty that established Nepal's boundary line. This treaty was the result of the Anglo-Nepalese war.

² Treaty of Titaliya- The treaty granted the British authorities in Sikkim a number of economic and political advantages. However, it was also decided that the region would not be directly subject to colonial rule and would be a separate entity.

the year 1835 a deed of grant brought about an end to the negotiation. A deed³ of grant was extracted by the British from the Raja of Sikkim on 1st February 1835 as a result Darjeeling was surrendered to the British East India Company” (O’Malley 1902).

Wangyal (2002) further states that the discovery of Darjeeling had come like a blessed rain after the long period of drought which brought many advantages assisting strategically in directing the gateway to Bhutan and Nepal, and assisting in the defensive line of the trade network to Tibet via Sikkim. However, during the initial phase, the Britishers faced difficulties in reaching Darjeeling as the road from Rangpur to Darjeeling went through the Terai region which was still under Sikkim. This enabled the Britishers to undertake the programs for the development of Darjeeling and the construction of roads and railways. Meanwhile, disputes with neighboring Bhutanese states erupted and continuously plundered the regions surrounding Darjeeling. In order to negotiate with Bhutan Ashley Eden was appointed, however this brought no results hence in the year 1864 a military force was sent to Bhutan's Dooars. In November 1865 ‘Treaty of Sinchula’⁴ was signed, the adjacent areas of Bhutan, as well as the passages leading to the hills of Kalimpong, were given back to the British. From 1919-1935, the district of Darjeeling including the Terai region were considered to be backward tracts and from 1935 till the end of the British rule in India, Darjeeling district and the entire Terai region remained moderately eliminated (Moktan 2004). There has been a series of important events that occurred in and around the corridor region that led to the evolution of the corridor. These major events have been discussed below.

2.3 Partition of India 1947

The main turning point for the corridor's development can be dated back to the subcontinent's partition, which resulted in the creation of two separate countries, India

³ “ The Governor General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputtee Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor General; hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is all the land South of the Great Rangit river, east of the Balasun, Kahail and Little Rangit rivers and west of Rungno (Tista) and Mahanadi rivers”

⁴ Treaty of Sinchula- After the Anglo-Bhutan War of 1864 and the Treaty of Sinchula which was signed the following year, the entire area east of the Teesta River as well as the Dooars was ceded to British India and this ceded area was attached to the Western Dooars District.

and Pakistan.⁵ The partition of India after the independence led to one of the massive migrations in the history of people (Bharadwaj, P., & Mirza, R. A 2016). This event entirely changed the scenario of the Siliguri- Dooars corridor, that stretches from Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and the Terai region. The corridor got developed into a transit spot, a region promoting economic development around high-quality transit service facilitating mobility (National Association of City Transportation Officials) and an important junction attracting migrants in search of work from Bihar, East Bengal, Jharkhand and neighboring nations (Nepal and Bhutan). The corridor eventually grew into being a narrow stretch of land that connected the North Eastern states surrounded by the international boundary of Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and China to the north with the Indian Mainland.

Chatterjee (1999) argues that “the partition of India in the year 1947 created scars of incursion with the new geographical demarcations of borders. The partition further led to the division of Bengal into two regions of West Bengal and East Bengal.” East Bengal region was included as the part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Radcliff report commissioned by the British government drew the line of the borders and created two separate nations based on two different nationalities of Hindus and Muslims. This was done with a notion that they could not co-exist subsequently with Jinnah leaving the Congress and joining the Muslim league in order to establish a separate political ground for Muslims from the Hindus (James 1990). The Government of Pakistan later renamed East Bengal as East Pakistan in the year 1955. This territorial demarcation had huge repercussions for South Asia as a region. Firstly, it led to the process of decolonization. This event marked the independence of India and Pakistan from the British Raj. However, it also marked the beginning of the international conflict between India and Pakistan. The Radcliff report had given much of its importance in the economic necessities over the community population while demarcating the borders.

The Chittagong Hill tracts in Bengal despite having a very less Muslim population of about 3 percent was given to Pakistan with a reason of a having economic ties between Chittagong district and the hill Tracts together (Chester 2002). The Radcliff commission

⁵ Pakistan here includes present day Bangladesh as well. That was termed as East Pakistan back then.

gave whole of Kolkata along with the districts of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri to West Bengal. This demarcation gave West Bengal a crucial corridor that was important in linking the two districts of North Bengal with the rest of the province (Banerjee 2018).

The partition also had huge consequences on the North Eastern region. Drawing of the Radcliff line isolated the north-east region from the mainland. It connected this region by a narrow corridor of about 60 km known as the Chicken Neck corridor with the Indian main land. (Sharma and Handique 2018).

Rao (1972) argues that the North East region had been neglected since the colonial time as it had no direct access to the sea or through land. The only connection the region had to the Bay of Bengal was through the Brahmaputra River. Sharma and Handique (2018) further point out that after the partition the access to Chittagong and Kolkata port were completely lost by Assam. This created the stoppage of all the goods coming in transit to and from Assam, thus disrupting the river trade. This had a huge effect in the export of tea and jute trade as Brahmaputra River flowed through both India and Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Before the partition, the only rail connection between Kolkata and Guwahati was through East Bengal. After the partition this rail connection was cut off and there was no rail connectivity between the Indian mainland and the North East region. This difficulty was put to an end with the construction of the rail link from Takiragram to Siliguri through the foot hills of the Himalayas in 1950. The railway line running from Assam's Fakiragram and Bihar's Kishanganj was restored on an emergency basis beginning around 1948. This new railway project became known as the Assam Rail Link project, and it was completed in two years.

It involved a very difficult task with the construction of railway tracts in an inhospitable landscape that was marked with swampy lands and water bodies. The construction of this new railway line developed the new geographical link of Assam with the Indian main land. At present the rail connection between North East India and Bengal has greatly improved with the construction of a bridge over Ganga at Barauni and another

at Farakka. Now there is direct train service between Guwahati and New Delhi and Guwahati and Howrah. (Sharma and Handique 2018).

The partition of India redesigned geographical borders and it created a range of salutary problems in terms of the demarcations. Apart from the geographical demarcations, the partition provided a different perspective at the way people looked at the traditional borders. The traditional markers of boundaries like the rivers, mountains and forests were given a distinct departure from this cartographic relic. The Radcliff line was drawn in haste without much of a concern looking at the ground reality. The bifurcation of the borders was to be done on the basis of the area dominated by the Hindu majority and the Muslim majority, but the ground reality was entirely different as most of the people in the enclaves did not live on the basis of the religion. This created a huge problem for the people living in the enclaves across the border, as they had to relocate themselves to a new area leaving behind everything they owned across the border and start living afresh in a new location altogether. This also created the crisis of migration that continued for decades in parts of Assam, Tripura, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. This partition of 1947 not only created the problems of relocation due to new geographical borders but also had a huge effect in the formation of mental borders as well (Sharma and Handique, 2018).

The partition caused identity and citizenship crisis with mass level of atrocities, it further led to the exploitation of the migrants as a large number of people became refugees in their own states (Banerjee 2018).

Furthermore, the people who lived around the border areas suffered a lot as the villages in the border areas depended on weekly village markets and *haats* and now with the partition the villagers have to cross cut the borders for their regular supplies and daily necessities. This meant that the existing local trade has been drastically interrupted (Chatterjee 1999).

The areas in and around the borderlands had to go through massive alterations in terms of geographical imagination post 1947. The situation changed drastically than what

it used to be during the colonial times, the interference of the state in and around the borderland increased. This created a number of issues in terms of adjustment for the people to shift, migrate and settle down in the new demarcated borders. The people often crossed the borders even after the partition and this eventually led to several unpleasant events (Sharma and Handique 2018).

However, despite the geographical demarcations there had been visible perspective differences in terms of identity clash between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. The two major differences that cropped up between the people of East Pakistan and West Pakistan were in terms of language and dress code (Ranjan 2016:113).

Tensions arose in the year 1952 over the issue of the status of Bengali as a national language and eventually the status of Bengali language as a national language was granted in the year 1955. Apart from the language dress code too marked a major difference especially of the women's who were considered as the preservers of the society's culture. The women's in East Pakistan wore saris and teep (bindi) ⁶that showed a very close shared culture with the women's of West Bengal. This created an issue as the authority strictly warned against it considering it to be the dress of the Hindu women and a threat putting Islam in danger, the ideology on which Pakistan was created. East Pakistan eventually became a hub of atrocities over the population of Bengali speaking Hindu communities by the dominant Pakistan's army of the West Pakistan. This further led to mass forced migration to the Indian territories from East Pakistan because of the proximity of the borders (Hazarika 2006: 23).

2.4 Liberation of Bangladesh 1971

The geostrategic relevance of the Siliguri-Dooars Corridor was furthered by the liberation of Bangladesh in the year 1971 and the merger of Sikkim in the year 1975. The Indo Pak war of 1971 was a landmark event in the history of India as the Indian armed forces along with the East Pakistanis Bengali fighters of a liberation war carved out an

⁶ A Bindi is a colored mark on the forehead or, in modern times, a sticker that women wear on the centre of their forehead.

independent and a sovereign nation of Bangladesh. India's intervention in East Pakistan has played a crucial role in the liberation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. India stood firmly behind the fight against the brutal aggression on the people of East Bengal in the year 1971 by the Pakistani government. After the liberation of Bangladesh, the corridor grew its strategic importance due to its proximity with the international borders (Murshid 2011:54).

Majumdar (2014) argues that India's role has been instrumental in gaining Independence for Bangladesh. Bangladesh shares 90 percent of its international border with India. It has a maritime access to Bay of Bengal, that is mostly dominated by the presence of Indian Navy. The north eastern regions of India comprising of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura are in turn locked by Bangladesh, this makes India to seek transit rights through Bangladesh. Hence, the creation of Bangladesh defined new geopolitics for the corridor. This has further developed the Siliguri- Dooars Corridor to be a critical and a vulnerable passage for Bangladesh to have a land access and the Indian mainland to keep itself integrated with the north eastern states (Majumdar 2014).

After the liberation of Bangladesh, the newly independent country, Bangladesh was economically and socially weak and politically unstable, the country was interwoven with terrorism and many anti Indian groups protected and promoted by Pakistan's ISI were working in Bangladesh. The porous border that India shares with Bangladesh made it easier for terrorist groups to enter India and easily access the North Eastern region of India, particularly through the Siliguri-Dooars corridor. It has been observed that small cadres of Bangladesh's Jama'at-e-Islami terrorist group received support from Pakistan radical groups active in India's North Eastern states. The issue of migration had been another important aspect in this regard as the groups like Bangladeshi militant groups like HuJI (B) as well as ISI started taking shelter in this sensitive region (Sharma and Bahera 2014).

The illegal migration from Bangladesh has been one of the most challenging factors that makes the Siliguri-Dooars Corridor sensitive. The consistent upsurge of migrants coming from Bangladesh has resulted in a high population density in the region,

posing a further threat to the region's peace and security. However, West Bengal have adopted 'Bangladeshi migrant-friendly' approach and has avoided to check and prevent the influx of illegal migrants for their political gains. This has been done mainly to enlarge support bases of various political parties. They have even gone so far as to legalize their presence by issuing ration cards, voter identification cards, and other identity-related documents to illegal Bangladeshi migrants. (Bhattacharjee 2015).

According to a United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs report, India ranked ninth in 2010, accounting for 2.5% of all international migrants (5,436,012); and Bangladeshi migrants have been the focus of attention in India (Subhakanta 2011). However, after 1991 there was a trend of change in the pattern of migration, earlier the people that migrated from Bangladesh were mostly confined to the states of West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. But in the recent years there have been influx of migration even to the Indian states of Delhi, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu as there has been constant demand of labor (Subhakanta 2011)

“Bangladesh's emergence resulted in a slew of long-standing international issues. Some of these issues led to war (several between India and Pakistan), others disrupted traditional trading relationships (both between India and Bangladesh and between India and Pakistan), and still others spawned a slew of politically fraught and frequently illegal activities, such as cross-border migration, smuggling, arms trafficking, and separatist violence. Over the decades, an equally diverse set of potential remedies has been used to mend things, including the construction of some of the world's longest border fencings; bilateral agreements concerning trade, maritime boundaries, and the sharing of transboundary river waters; and, most notably, the establishment of the multilateral South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985” (Wirsing al et 2016).

Cross Border terrorism is another issue that makes the corridor a sensitive region. The unchecked influx of the illegal migrants from Bangladesh constitutes a critical security threat that makes the entire region vulnerable. The blast in Burdwan on 2nd October 2014 suggests that the Islamic militants from Bangladesh had entered through

the Siliguri corridor along with the economic migrants. The Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin-Bangladesh (JMB), an Islamic terrorist group operating in the sub-region, has developed as a serious risk to the corridor. According to the National Investigation Agency, this terrorist organization had a number of networks in India, particularly in West Bengal. According to reports, many members of this group were recruited from West Bengal and Assam to take up arms, with instruction and brain washing taking place in Burdwan and Murshidabad. As a result, radical Islamic groups in Bangladesh have been focusing on expanding their influence beyond the border and has been using West Bengal as a launching pad and a breeding ground for spreading their activities (Bhattacharjee 2015).

The international borders along the North eastern states and North Bengal districts have made the corridor region sensitive and vulnerable through external support from the insurgent group. The emergence of Kamtapur Liberation organization in the corridor region is one such example of an insurgent organization. The 1800km porous border with Nepal has been an easy entry point for the anti-Indian agents of ISI. Bangladesh is also believed to be a new emerging import and exporting center of the terrorists along with Pakistan pushing support in terms of money and arms to the insurgent groups in North East and Eastern India (2009).

The insurgencies have also created an unrest in the north eastern regions which has created a threat of internal and external security in the corridor region as well that also hampers the socio-economic development with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal (Bhaumik 2007). The corridor is frequently used by insurgent groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). It is because of this reason that the corridor is deployed by heavy armed forces such as the Indian army, Border Security Force, and SSB (Panda 2014).

2.5 India- China War 1962

The India- China war of 1962 marked an important event in the history of the long boiling boundary dispute between the two Asian giants. Until 1950s the relation between India and China had been a cordial one. In 1954, the two countries signed an agreement on Tibet to resolve and settle their differences and to maintain respect and understanding for their respective territorial sovereignty and integrity through a policy of

non-intervention and non-interference in each other's affairs. However, by the end of 1959 it appeared that China had alarmingly increased their border aggression in the Himalayan region of Aksai Chin border. It was eventually reported that the territories captured by China in the Ladakh region were difficult for the Indian government to recover as the Chinese forces in the border regions were in an advantageous position as compared to the Indian Army (Abadi 1998).

Map 2.2 Disputed border areas between India and China



Source: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2012/02/08/fantasy-frontiers>

This long territorial dispute over the border region escalated into a full warfare through an open assault by China on India. The major conflict between the two countries took place at the different ends of the Himalayan region, in the border regions of Aksai Chin in the west and the Northeast Frontier Agency. The border tensions dates back to the nineteenth century with efforts made by the British officials in India that delineated the unmapped region in the higher parts of the Himalayas. The India-Tibet Simla conference in the year 1914 had accepted the McMahon line to be the official boundary.

China despite having a claim over the Tibet region accepted this boundary demarcation, however it claimed to have sovereignty over the Indian part of the mountain regions and this eventually created the region of 500 square miles into a zone of dispute. The border dispute over this region was entirely speculative until the independence of India and the 1947 partition the government of India tried to maximize its writ of establishment over the region, simultaneously the invasion of Tibet by the Chinese government in the year 1950 and the suppression of the Tibetans rebels in the year 1957 showed China's supremacy of national dominance at the greatest height. Although India had recognized China's claim over Tibet, Nehru's forward policy leading to the deployment of forces along the borders of the McMahon line and Dalai Lama's asylum in India in the year 1959 led to bitter relations between India and China that ultimately led to clashes along the border areas. (Devereux 2009:72).

Abadi (1998) argues that China's control over Tibet had been very effective by the constructions of roads, railways and airfields connecting China through Aksai Chin, the building of a road in the region of Aksai Chin clearly violated the McMahon line. China had also fully conducted military exercises along the borders and had even provoked border tensions in the NEFA border areas. China's long contested validity of the British cartographic relic of the McMahon that divided India and Tibet and the sudden attack in the Himalayan frontiers brought about huge importance to India's geopolitical position in Asia.

Bruke (1963) opines that the Indo China war of 1962 was a historic event that brought about critical aspects of border disputes for the two Asian giants. The 2,500 miles long frontier border between India and Tibet lies in the world's highest mountain range that is divided by the states of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. India's frontier with Tibet can further be divided into eastern, central and western. China's claim over the central sector is relatively less, however the border in the eastern sector that lies along the McMahon line running from Burmese to the Bhutan border China here claims an area of 32,000 square miles of this region. In the western sector that is comprised of the Ladakh region China claims an area of 15,000 square miles asserting that this territory has been in their possession for two hundred years. On the other hand, India's claim over the

eastern and the western sector is based on the history, tradition and treaties that was signed with the ruler of Tibet after being defeated by the ruler of Ladakh in the war of 1842, however this treaty has not been accepted by China. The Indo China skirmish over the border issues has been fluctuated from time to time and has not been presented with a precise geographical term.

Cheong (2015) states that the McMahon line drawn by the Britishers served as the north eastern border between India and China. Despite the acceptance of the McMahon line separating the two countries and the establishment of the five key pillars of peaceful co-existence in 1954, relations between India and China eventually deteriorated. The primary concern he highlighted was the issue of Tibet where in the Chinese were not contended with India for carrying forward the British imperial strategy to turn Tibet into a buffer zone. India's grant of asylum to Dalai Lama in the year 1959 further strained the India-China relations. The second issue was the disputed territorial claims from both the sides over the Aksai Chin region situated on the western border.

Bruke (1963) further argues that the disputed territory of the eastern border and the western border differs completely as the eastern sector is inhabited and is further administered by the Indian government whereas the western sector is completely uninhabited. Moreover, China has a greater interest over the western sector because of the position of the Ladakh region here that links Tibet to Sinkiang. China's occupation of this region would expose Tibet to a Chinese Sinkiang. In the years 1956-57 China even constructed roads running through the Ladakh plateau of Aksai Chin region. This further amplified the border tensions between India and China.

Lama (2016:40) argues that the key factor of dispute and national discourse between the two nations – India and China, is the physical border. This has further shaped their foreign policy actions and determined their dogged pursuit of national interests. The aftermath of India-China war of 1962, led to a deep scrutinization of the border areas – as they were the forefront of national security that required protection from the defence forces. In recent times, the disputed border regions are heavily guarded and dominated by the military forces on both sides of the nations, this further reflects the strategic, social, political and economic infrastructure and restricted cross border

exchanges. Nath (2004) states that the north-eastern region due to its strategic location bordering different nations, plays a crucial role in terms of India's foreign policy and its diplomacy during the 1962 war of India and China and the India-Pakistan War of 1971. However, the 1962 war between India and China signified the beginning of India's realistic foreign policy.

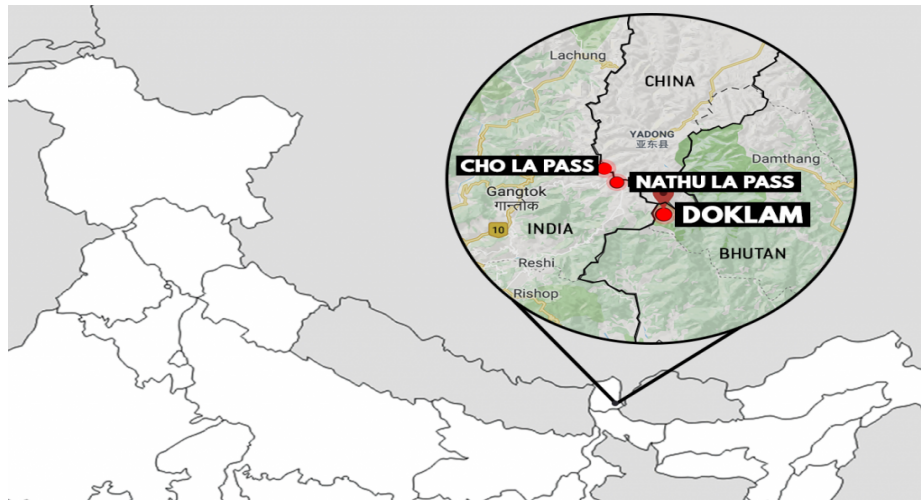
Qaddos (2018) is of the opinion that dynamic relationship between India and China, plays a key role in driving the politics, economy as well as, connectivity, geopolitics and geo-economics of the region. However, China and India are unable to resolve their border disputes, even though at the same time, these nations have vested interest and multi-sectoral collaborations amongst them. It has become apparent that the border hostilities are a recurring matter. There was an incessant peril of a full – blown war to break out at any moment. However, due to the various factors including economic and trade relations, geopolitical circumstances, international reputation along with an imbalance in the power scales, led to the conflict be pacified. These nations need to collaborate to build lasting solution regarding these border disputes. It is critical for India and China to collaborate in order to achieve peace and harmony within the South Asian region.

Both India and China have experienced periods of peace and war. During peace, there are efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation whereas in the latter, peace process is sabotaged by aggression and hostility from both sides. Both countries fought a war in 1962 over border conflict, ending in Chinese victory. But despite the defeat, India refused to negotiate with China for the resolution of this border conflict. Although both countries agreed to restore their diplomatic relations after a long period of fourteen years but they could not develop mutual consensus to resolve this issue. The lack of conflict-resolution process poses serious threats to security of not only both the countries but the whole South Asian region. There have been efforts for adopting a more mature approach towards resolving the border conflict, however it seems that the dispute is far from reaching a viable solution (Qaddos2018).

2.6 Clash of Nathu La and Cho La 1967

Subsequent to the India-China War of 1962, there were prolonged continuity of disputes along the Himalayan borders of India and China. Following the Nathu La and Cho La military clashes, also known as the Sino-Indian War of 1967, Sikkim's strategic importance in the context of Sino-India border security re-emerged along the borders of the Himalayan Kingdom (Lidarev 2015).

Map2.1 Map of Nathu La and Cho La pass



Source: <https://theprint.in/past-forward//38330/>

Wangchuk (2013) writes that historically Sikkim had maintained close cultural and economic ties with Tibet. These ties were facilitated by the Himalayan passes of Nathu La, Cho La and Jelep La. The Cho La mountain pass was used by the Sikkimese Royal Family to access their summer palace in the Tibetan Chumbi Valley, while the Nathu La and Jelep La passes were used by Tibetan yak herders to access the pasture lands of Sikkim. The said passes also acted as key trading routes between the two kingdoms. It was with the arrival of the British in India and their interest in Tibet and the markets it offered, that the historical ties between Sikkim and Tibet began to weaken.

Nathu La Clash

According to the accounts of Major General Singh (2021) the Nathu La skirmish took place on 11th September 1967 and lasted till 15th September 1967. The major issue

of the clash was regarding the borderline of Nathu La mountain pass. The People's Liberation Army of China began tunnelling ditches and trenches on the Sikkimese edge of the border (Nathu La) and later attacked the Indian posts to gain control over the Chumbi valley borderland. There were casualties at both side of the borders, however the Indian Army was able to suppress the attack leading to a substantial reduction in the hold of Chinese influence in this region. During the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, China gave an ultimatum to India to evacuate the Nathu La pass on September 16, 1965. However, India refused, claiming that Nathu La was located on the watershed, which formed the natural boundary.

Yadav and Rana (2020) argue that the main issue of this skirmish was regarding the McMahon line drawn between India and China by the Britishers. China claimed that the line was created unlawfully and hence it raised the question of the fencing at the Nathu La pass. The clash raised alarming security concerns for India as it brought light to the constant growing interest of China in the valley region.

Cho La Clash

The Cho La pass located few kilometers north of Nathu La underwent another military skirmish on 1st October 1967 that took place between India and China and ended on the same day. Ekelen (2016) argues "that the clash was initiated by China by infiltrating the Chinese troops in the Sikkim side of the border. According to the accounts of Major Thapliyal the clash lasted for a day and the Chinese troops withdraw their forces nearly three kilometers in the Cho La pass". According to Fravel (2008), clashes between India and China over disputed territory in the Chumbi valley have played a critical role in demonstrating the effects of China's security-centric regime and its use of force against India. Garver (2011) states that it was after the Nathu La clash that the Indian government increased more concerns for Sikkim regarding China's intentions

Nathu La Trade

The Nathu La pass has been opened for the border trade in the year 2006 after 44 years of its abrupt closure. However, the focus on the Cho La pass still remains closed today. The opening of the Nathu La pass has shifted the course of India-China relations.

The opening up of Nathu La pass has been recognized with great logistic benefits. It has proved to have a shortest access to a port for the densely populated part of Tibet and the pass has also given a reliable passage route for main land China via Kolkata. Hence apart from the clashes and border tension in the past the opening of trade in Nathu La has played a critical role as a border trade post that links the north east region of India with South west China (Wangchuk 2013).

2.7 Merger of Sikkim

The merger of Sikkim as a 22nd state of India in the year 1975 was another remarkable landmark event that further enlarged the strategic importance of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor. Sikkim is geographically located in the eastern Himalayan with an area of about 7096 sq km. Rock (1953:925) opines that Sikkim is wedged between Bhutan on the East and Nepal on the west, the northern region is bordered by Tibet and the southern region is bordered by the Himalayan foothills of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. Ram (1975:59) argues that the state of Sikkim is roughly shaped like cleaved amphitheater, the lower bowl of the amphitheater is formed by the Teesta Valley, Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The Himalayan ranges and the People's Republic of China's Tibet autonomous region flanks the northern portion. Nepal borders it on the west, and Bhutan on the east. The area of Sikkim is geographically very tiny yet it forms the front line of India's disputed border with China. Moreover, the presence of a narrow triangular projection known as the Chumbi Valley of the Tibet Autonomous Region that extends between Sikkim and Bhutan historically has been the only means of communication for Tibet with the southern region, mainly Lhasa and other major towns such as Gyantse and Yatung through important passes such as Nathu La, Jelep La, and Cho La. The southern region of Sikkim is opened to Kalimpong and the Siliguri-Dooars Corridor. As a result, this narrow stretch of corridor is critical for India's security because it connects the entire North Eastern states to the Indian mainland (Ram 1974:59).

Sikkim has historically played a crucial part for the development of Himalayan policies including both India and China. The British Indian officials had warned about China's expansion from Tibet to the neighboring areas and hence the parts of Sikkim and Bhutan holds a strategic position for India as Buffer states. Levi (1959). Sen (1975)

opines that due to the geographical location and strategic significance of Sikkim the Britishers developed its attention towards the region. During the Anglo- Nepalese war of 1814, the relation between the Britishers and Sikkim grew into a necessity of political and military needs as Sikkim could be used to communicate with China via Tibet as the King of Sikkim had close ties with Tibet through matrimonial alliance as well in term of religious affinity. It was in these lines that the Britishers developed close contacts with the authorities of Sikkim and promised to help Sikkim to recover its lost territories during Nepalese invasion of 1780. In return to this Sikkim faithfully agreed to support the Britishers.

The end of Anglo-Nepal war ended by signing of Treaty of Sugauli in the year 1815. In the year 1817 treaty of Titalia was signed between Sikkim and the Britishers, this treaty marked the interest of the Britishers in Sikkim, the treaty provided security by the Britishers for Sikkim and further returned the annexed land of the Sikkimese that were taken by the Nepalese over the centuries. The treaty was crucial as now Sikkim was made a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan and this helped the British officials to check the Nepalese in the east. Later in 1835, all the land south of the Great Rangeet River, east of the Balasun, Kahil, and Little Rangeet rivers, and west of the Rungno and Mahanadi rivers were granted by deed. In 1841, the British Government sanctioned an annual subsidy of Rs. 3,000/- as compensation to Sikkim instead of an equivalent tract in exchange. In 1846, it was raised to Rs. 6,000. The territory thus ceded to the British later on became the nucleus of the district of Darjeeling. The cession of Darjeeling was a watershed moment in the East India Company's relationship with Sikkim. Darjeeling became an important observation post of the British in the Himalayas and enhanced the possibilities of trade with Tibet. The signing of the Treaty of 1861 was one of the most important phases of British- Sikkim relations as it recognized Sikkim as British protectorate. Th treaty brought Sikkim under the control of British (Sen 1975:348)

After independence, Sikkim was declared to be India's protectorate in the year 1949, this meant that now independent India took the responsibility of foreign affairs, communications and defence of Sikkim as a whole Levi (1959). Singh (1977) argues that at the time of independence the state of Sikkim had a standstill agreement with India.

Later the government of India went on a treaty with the Sikkim Darbar and finally Sikkim was made a protectorate of India a continued legacy of the Britishers, while the other India states were brought into the Indian union, Sikkim on the other continued to remain as a separate identity under the responsibility of the Indian government.

Gupta (1975) argues that the referendum of April 1975 that approved the merger of Sikkim with India brought in the sensitive eastern Himalayan state to a full circle because of the strategic location of Sikkim that is placed on the map of India. He further argues that since the late 19th century a series of constitutional experiments had been underway seeking to define the status of the country. Geopolitics and ethnicity had both been the problem of Sikkim, geographically located between India and China, it was firstly used as an access to Tibet and later after Tibet being annexed by China, Sikkim became the passage to India. Sikkim was associated with various pressures from both sides of India and China. Majumdar (1977) argues that the state of Sikkim has been one of an important state of political importance in terms of its geographical location for the security of India and also an important sector in the North eastern region with its close relation with the neighboring states of Nepal, Bhutan. The developments in this region have always been critical for India's foreign policy in a way that it has made Siliguri-Dooars corridor to be advantageously relevant for India's security concerns.

Rose (1969) argues that geographically Sikkim is located in the most strategic position that makes it one of the most exposed and volatile frontier regions situated in South Asia for both India and China. Sikkim is strategically very important for India as it is a major communication link to Tibet. "Today the dagger-shaped projection of Tibet, the Chumbi valley that is driven like a wedge between half of Sikkim's eastern border and Bhutan holds a great relevance in terms of India's security purpose and towards the south lies the hilly" (Basnet 1975).

Panda (2013) argues "that though the situation has changed and improved since the pre 1971 era when India's relations with China in the north and East Pakistan was associated with constant cross border tension". However, the Indian strategist have

anticipated a future where the strategically relevant Chicken neck corridor is precisely the point where China could hit and choke the corridor by cutting off the entire northeast region from the Indian mainland in case of escalating conflict between the two Asian giants. Haider (2020) argues that the ongoing tensions between India and China in the Himalayan borders has brought much attention towards the highly sensitive Chicken neck corridor. He further opines that strategically, the Siliguri-Dooars corridor is at a vulnerable point in terms of the defence with China. China's growing aspiration with continuing construction of roads and infrastructural activities on its side of the border brings in a constant threat to the Chicken neck corridor as it would allow China to rapidly mobilize the region.

2.8 Naxalite Movement

The Naxalite uprising that started in the late 1960's began in the Himalayan foot hills of West Bengal, known as the Terai region originated in a small village called Naxalbari (Gupta 1990). In 1967, the Naxalite movement in India was born in Naxalbari, a remote village in West Bengal. The strategic significance of Naxalbari area is the precise location of about 15 to 14 miles away from the Siliguri corridor connects the main portion of India's land mass with the North eastern states of India. This area had piqued the interest of external powers and neighboring states looking to cause problems for India both externally and internally. The stronghold Maoist revolutionary movement in Naxalbari made the corridor region to be of critical significance for India's internal security.

Bimal Kissan, a tribal youth, obtained a judicial order allowing him to plough his land. The local landlords attacked him with the help of their goons and musclemen. This event enraged the local tribal population, prompting a violent retaliation by the tribal community in order to reclaim their lands. The incidents in Naxalbari developed into of a massive rebellion, gaining visibility and support in states such as West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and parts of Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. In 1967, a faction of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI(M)] led by Charu Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal led a violent uprising. They attempted to form a "revolutionary opposition" to the CPI

(M) leadership. The "Naxalbari Uprising" began when revolutionary cadres of the CPI (M) attacked the landlord. Charu Mazumdar was the leader of the uprising. Similarly, Chandra Pulla Reddy led a peasant revolution in Srikakulam, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh. Both incidents were violent in nature and were inspired by the success of Communist movements in China and Russia.

“The then United Front government led by the CPI (Marxist) came down heavily on the rebellion using all kinds of repressive measures. In response to that, the participants of the “revolution” formed the All-India Coordination Committee of Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in May 1968. “Allegiance to armed struggle and non-participation in the elections” formed the cornerstone of the AICCCR. The radicals comprehended the Indian situation then to be similar to that in China prior to 1949 and characterized it as essentially semi-colonial and semi-feudal. Based on that analysis, the revolutionaries concluded that the “People’s Democratic Revolution” should be launched in India by immediately resorting to an armed struggle on the Chinese lines” (Manoranjan 1977).

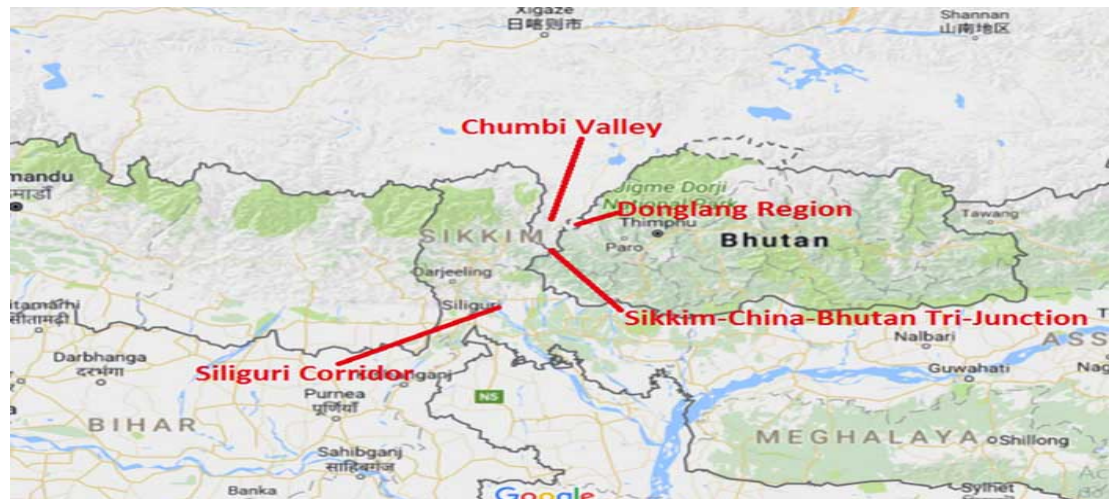
The then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has identified the Naxalites as the greatest internal security threat to India. This proposition is supported by the original problem difficult and complicated and structural causes. The Naxal movement also poses the greatest long-term threat to India, enhance key underlying flaws in India's democratic accountability, political structures, and socioeconomic structure (Pradhan 2015). Naxalism is caused by a variety of factors. There are four of them: political, social, historical, and economic. It needs to be recognized that the Naxal problem encompasses more than media propaganda. It is undeniably a serious issue that will jeopardize our ambition to emerge as the next economic power. The impact of this long revolution, the security threats of the Siliguri region have increased manifold times owing to the fact that Naxalbari subdivision of Siliguri district is the birthplace of Naxalism in India.

2.9 Doklam Standoff

Since the clashes of Nathu La and Cho La in the year 1967, the India-China borders have witnessed several skirmishes and territorial disputes. The Doklam standoff,

which took place on June 8, 2017, was a major test for India-China relations. The clash took place in the Doklam plateau, a disputed area of about 89 square kilometers in western Bhutan near East Sikkim, between both the Indian Army and China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Bardalai 2018). The Doklam plateau's geographical location seems to be very near to the Siliguri-Dooars corridor, which adds Bhutan's concern as well as a Chinese dimension, making the corridor vulnerable (Dhakal 2014). The Chumbi valley's close proximity to hostile China in the north between Sikkim and Bhutan, acting as a dagger-like piece of Tibetan territory, makes it strategically important in the entire Eastern Himalayan region (Kannan 2016).

Map 2.3 Map of Chumbi Valley and Sikkim-China-Bhutan Tri junction



Source: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/china-and-india-a-lesson-in-conflict-resolution/>

Doklam, as called in Bhutan is also known as Doka La in India and Donglang in China, has become a geopolitical flashpoint between India and China. Located in Bhutan to the north of India (Sikkim), Bhutan, and China (Tibet), and is adjacent to the Narrow Chumbi valley. The military standoff at Doklam between Indian border guards (Indian Army and ITBP - Indo Tibetan Border Police) and Chinese PLA (People's Liberation Army) forces was reportedly triggered by Chinese PLA forces, who were attempting to build a class 5 motorable road connecting Doka La (Doklam plateau) and the Jampheri ridge in Bhutan. This road would also aim to make it easier for China's military supply

chain management to transport, potentially overlooking India's topographic strategic value in Doklam. The Doklam plateau is a highly controversial issue respectively between Bhutan and China. Both countries attempted to resolve the dispute but were unable to reach an agreement. In the case of the disputed Doklam plateau, China and Bhutan reached two agreements in 1988 and 1998 that allowed them to maintain the status quo that existed prior to the 1959 case. While India and Bhutan signed a treaty that gives India control over Bhutan's defence and foreign affairs, India is concerned with preserving Bhutan's sovereignty.

When China invaded Doklam, India intervened on behalf of Bhutan, halting Chinese road construction efforts. In retaliation, China destroyed Indian army bunkers and prevented Indian Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims from passing through the Nathu La pass. Doklam, despite its small size, holds significant geopolitical and strategic significance for both countries. For India, control of Doklam will facilitate easy transportation of military supplies to its various north eastern army camps. India can strengthen diplomatic ties with Bhutan while also monitoring Chinese presence in the country. Most importantly, a strong Indian presence in Doklam could protect the Chicken neck from Chinese aggression (Kumar 1999).

Jhoshi (2017) states that the Doklam issue has amplified the question over where the trijunction lies. India and Bhutan mark it at 200 meters South east of Batang La on the other hand, the Chinese marks it at a place called Gimpochi. The territory south of Batang La that is believed to be Bhutan's but China has constantly contested Bhutan's claim over it.

Kumar (2019) "argues that the stand-off between India and China on the Doklam plateau was unavoidable in the long history of conflict and unease along the 2,500-mile fringe". Chubb (2017) argues that the seventy-three-day standoff between India and China was a very critical confrontation since the 1962 war. He also believes that the standoff might well have shifted ahead in the path of the Jampheri ridge, which connects down to a narrow low-lying plain of the India's north eastern region to the rest of the

country. India's bold intervention was prompted by the fact that the road to the ridge would allow the Chinese to seize control of the Chicken neck corridor.

Gopalswamy and Manning (2017) argue that the Doklam border issue is however different than the other border disputes due to the involvement of a third country. Bhutan has a relationship with India essentially that of a client state and hence its foreign policy must in accordance with the terms of its independence, be aligned with India. Despite the easing of the tension over Doklam there has been no adjustment made so far between India and China regarding their territorial claims. China's intentions regarding Doklam clearly reflects the pattern that it has employed in both South China and East China seas using its instrument of expansion, in Bhutan it used road as a force of assertive expansion and in South China sea it has reclaimed more than 3,200 acres of land transforming disputed reefs and rocky outcrops into islands.

The Indian Army, Border Security Force (BSF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), and West Bengal Police are heavily deployed throughout the region. The Chicken Neck corridor is home to two major airbases, Bagdogra and Hashimara, as well as an upcoming Army aviation base at Shaugaon. The Indian Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) are deployed in the border regions for China, Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) for Nepal and Bhutan, and Border Security Force (BSF) for the Bangladesh border. This is due to the one border, one force policy (2020 Satter).

Because of the strategic importance of Chumbi Valley, India is hesitant to approve any concessions made by Bhutan in exchange for land exchange with China (Bhonsle 2013). "China has been broadening its horizons in the Indian Ocean region in order to gain access to several maritime checkpoints of South China sea and to ensure China's presence throughout the region" (Goldstein 1991). Despite its geopolitical importance and role as a gateway to the North Eastern states and neighboring countries, the region has been unable to progress and develop (Malik 2015).

2.10 Pathways and Connectivity (Bhutan-Nepal)

In terms of pathways and connectivity, Walcott (2010) contends that the Himalayan states have always been a part of British India's defence system, acting as buffer states, and that the primary physical factor in this region is the Himalayan Mountain ranges and high passes. The strategic passages of Nathu la and Jelep la in Sikkim, as well as the pivot points of Bhutan and the Chumbi valley in Tibet, have long served as a battleground for India and China, as these passes serve as strategic mountain choke points, making the Siliguri corridor critical because the only way to these passes to cross Siliguri. The ancient silk route of India, or the trade route between India and China, is also only accessible through the passes of Sikkim (Nathu la and Jelep la) (Walcott 2010). The roads and railways in this region are a creation of the British rule. The roads prior to the coming of the Britishers were rough narrow tracks leading to dense forests and the only bridges were the cane bridges straddling the torrents (O Malley 1902).

Bhattacharya (2012) states that it was under the British rule between 1839 and 1842 and in 1860s roads were constructed from Siliguri to Darjeeling. Darjeeling has developed into a fast-growing town with numerous opportunities for business and commerce. The Hill Cart Road, which winds through the hills from Siliguri to Darjeeling, is the most important road in the district. The other important road is the Teesta Valley Road which is an important highway for travelers and merchants to Sikkim and Tibet with a distance of 34 miles from Sevok to Rangpoo adjoining Sikkim. (O Malley 1902).

The introduction of Railway brought about huge changes in Siliguri as well as the regions nearby. It was in the year 1878 an agent of the Eastern Bengal Rail Company, Franklin Prestage recommended the famous Darjeeling Toy Train to be laid between Calcutta and Darjeeling for the purpose of transportation of goods up and down the hills, simultaneously the Tea estates were flourishing and the traditional bullock carts were no longer able to transport goods from the tea gardens of Darjeeling to the plains of Siliguri (Saha 2019).

The Darjeeling Steam Tramway Company, later renamed the ‘Darjeeling Himalayan Railway’, was completed in 1881 and ran from the Terai foothills to the hill town. This helped facilitate large volume tea transport services while also shortening visitors' travel time (Bhattacharya 2012). The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway was also beneficial for the transportation of jute grown in Siliguri to the jute mills in Calcutta and hence the British companies such as the Raleigh Brothers, Landel, and Clark established godowns in Siliguri thus making the corridor a hub of economic activity (Saha 2019).

The New Jalpaiguri Railway Station is a major railway station in the entire north eastern region, and it is of enormous strategic importance because it allows not only the people of the region to connect with other parts of the country, but also the people of Nepal from places like Kakarvitta, Dhulabari, and Bittamore across the Mechi River to use the railway station as a means of connectivity with the rest of India (Ghosh 2016). Siliguri corridor is also the main junction for accessing the business routes to Bhutan via the Coronation bridge connecting Jaigoan and Phuntsholing. It also allows Nepalese residents from places such as Kakaravitta and Dhulabari across the Mechi River to use the corridor for accessing the nearest railway station for transportation and commercial purposes (Gosh 2016). The National Highway 31, which runs from Barhi in Jharkhand to Siliguri and eventually connects to Assam, is one of the most important highways connecting India's northeastern states. The NH 31 has two branches: the NH31A connects Gangtok, Sikkim's capital, to Sevoke on NH31, and the NH31C links Galgalia, West Bengal, to Bijni, Assam, passing Siliguri at the Naxalbari-Bagdogra corridor. As far as Sikkim is concerned this highway is the only crucial source link (Ghosh 2016). This highway is prone to many illegal activities such as illegal human and weapon trafficking due to the insurgents operating in the region (Kannan 2016).

Bhattacharjee (2015) argues that “in order to enhance the connectivity of the corridor between North Bengal and the North East regions the Indian government has proposed a project for the construction of a four-lane corridor from East to West running from southern Assam's Silchar to Siliguri, this is part of the National Highway Development Project, and in order to make the most effective use of the Siliguri corridor, the government is looking into expanding the Road to six lanes. However, there have

been difficulties in acquiring land in North Bengal for the proposed highway project". A railway line connecting Rangpoo, Sikkim's border town, and Siliguri is being built.

2.11 Tourism and Trade

Ghosh (2016) Bhutan and Nepal have been using this corridor for transportation of goods and the movement of the people. Bhutan's access to India via land through the route of Jaigoan and Phuntsolling border is accessible only by crossing Siliguri. Hence the corridor is vital for the use of roadways that facilitates economic activities used by the North eastern states to connect the Indian mainland and also by Nepal and Bhutan.

All in-land trade between the North East and the rest of India has been facilitated by the corridor. Apart from being a strategic economic hub since the colonial era, Siliguri has also provided educational opportunities to students from neighboring states as well as neighboring nations of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. Satter (2020). North Bengal as a whole has experienced a very slow rate of industrialization. 2016 (Kannan).

Siliguri corridor is also a hub of many imported goods and famous markets such as the markets located at Sevok road and Hill Cart Road and a popular shopping hub commonly known as the 'Hongkong market'. These markets are accessed by the people living in and around the region and also neighboring countries of Nepal and Bhutan. (Ghosh 2016).

However, despite the strategic relevance of the corridor and the region having logistics linkages with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and China, there has been no socio economic and political development of the entire corridor region mainly due to the political unrest in the North East region, the other conflicts in the neighboring countries. (Jha 2013).

CHAPTER 3

VULNERALIBITY OF THE CORRIDOR AND MAJOR THREATS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter briefly discusses the vulnerability of the Siliguri-Dooars (also known as the chicken's neck) corridor that has been interwoven with major threats and other problems that draw huge internal and external security problems in India. The corridor acts a narrow passage connecting the Indian mainland to its eight Northeastern states. The region has a close proximity with China which has made this corridor the Achilles heel (Malik 2015:700).

Upadhyay (2006:4993) states that the northeast of India is where South East Asia meets. The geographical location of the region is such that it has border with four countries namely Bhutan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Myanmar which makes it a strategically important location. Since the Siliguri-Dooars corridor is the only corridor linking the entire North east region with the rest of India, this shows that the north eastern states have a weak geographical and political connectivity to the Indian mainland. On the other hand, the conflict-ridden northeast region has been interwoven with insurgency, to ethnic clashes, and to a continuous inflow of migrants from across the borders, which has made the entire corridor region vulnerable. This is because the migrants come from across the borders. More than 26 active armed groups, including the National Socialist Council of Nagaland and the United Liberation Front of Assam, are located in the north-east. These groups have caused the displacement and destruction of generations of people and have continued to threaten the region (Singh 2009:11) The fact that the border with Bangladesh and Nepal is open and porous encourages a variety of criminal operations, such as the smuggling of weapons, drugs, and people. Borders that are unrestricted and those that are restrictive

When discussing geopolitics, the concepts of open borders as well as constrained borders are essential terms to understand. Wilcox (2009) opines that open border does not mean abolishment of borders; she further argues that freedom of international movement is a basic liberty possessed by every human being that includes right to immigrate to the country of one's choice. The porous nature of the open border requires more strict patrolling and border management where as a restricted border creates more conflicts and hence are associated with tensions within two nations. A restricted border prevents the country from external threat by ensuring the security of citizens and hence, needs strict border immigration rules and tightens the border security rules. Restricted border also assumes illegal migration as a threat like the porous one (Goddard 2012).

According to Bhattacharjee (2015), the corridor became more vulnerable to significant threats following the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 and the merger of the state of Sikkim with India in 1975, which led to a significant increase in security concerns. As the corridor's primary stakeholder, India needs to pay close attention to matters of both internal and external security.

Since 1947, when India and Pakistan gained their independence and were divided, there has been a clear worry about the security and safety of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor. The central government lacks interest in this part of India that has further led to frustration and discontentment among the people living in these regions. All of these factors have made the corridor exposed to serious threats (Malik 2015: 706). These factors have been further discussed in this chapter. Concerns regarding the security and stability of the corridor have been apparent ever since India and Pakistan attained their respective independence and were subsequently partitioned in the year 1947. (Hussain 2006)

3.2 Theater of Conflict

Historically the corridor has witnessed a very troubled past that makes it a 'zone of conflict'. The first Naxalite movement that began in India on 28th May 1967 led by Charu Mazumdar and Jangal Santhal started from the twin villages of Naxalbari and Phansidewa of Darjeeling district which is just 23 km away from the Siliguri corridor.

This region was the centre breeding ground of Marxist- Leninist revolutionaries that advocated the armed struggle against the Indian state (Mukherjee 2007).

The movement originated as an extremist wing of the Indian Communist movement and as a counterpart of Maoism and became the torch bearer of Marxist-Leninist revolutionary tradition. The movement had such an enormous impact in such a short period of phase it became linked to the Naxalite revolt and any violent protest against the government. This uprising in India since 1967 has affected not just the state of West Bengal but also its neighboring states such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar (Bhaumik 2007). Naxalbari that is located at the gateway of the Siliguri Dooars corridor has been the place of Indian Naxalism. Numerous armed organizations and secessionist militant groups have called the region home, including the KPLT NSCN, ULFA, NDFB, Islamic jihadist group, and KLO. Having three international borders, it has been reported that Pakistan has been using the India-Bangladesh border to smuggle arms and ammunition to support the insurgents in northeast India. The corridor has also been beneficial for undercover activities of ISI agents and the movements of goods and personals through the borders. (The Hindu 2002).

3.3 Gorkhaland Agitation

The plains of Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Kurseong, which are located in the eastern Himalayan foothills, have been experiencing waves of widespread violence and unrest. The agitation of 1986- 1988 was the most violent one for the demand of a separate state called Gorkhaland. The entire region is characterized by ongoing ethnic conflict (Dewan 1991). It is one of the most protracted demands of statehood in India's history. The initial demand dating back to 1907, the demand for Gorkhaland has fallen into deaf ears, despite the continuous cry of protest and agitation. The Indian government has not proposed a long-term answer to the problem, so there is currently none. The ongoing plea for statehood in the Queen of Hills is comparable to a dormant volcano that

occasionally erupts, causing political unrest and discontent in the hills despite the absence of a solution that is long-term (Kanwar 2018).

The first demand for a independent executive division in Darjeeling came in 1907 with the Hills Men Association sending a memo to the Morley Minto committee making this request (Pradhan 2012). The memorandum called for Darjeeling and the surrounding dooars region of Jalpaiguri to be split off into their own administrative region (Datta 1991). In 1917, another memorandum was signed by prominent leaders such as Yensing Sitling, S.W. Ladenla, Meghbir Singh, Naraprasad Singh, and Debanidhi Upadhyay. Ne-Bu-la, which means "unity of Nepali, Bhutia, and Lepchas," was their primary rallying cry. The Himalayan Association and the Gorkha Association, which formed between 1917 and 1927, jointly submitted a memorandum to Sir Samuel Hore advocating for autonomous administration (Chakrabarty et al. 2010).

On the eve of passing the Government of India Act 1935 the Hillmens Association passed another memorandum demanding Darjeeling to be excluded from West Bengal and an independent administrative unit to be set up (Datta 1994). Dambar Singh, a local of Darjeeling, was voted into office to state assembly after becoming one of the AIGL's most prominent leaders following the organization's founding in 1943. This has been discovered to be the case (Chakrabarty et al. 2010).

The main goal and objective of the AIGL was to unite Gorkhas of India as a whole and to establish the political rights of Gorkhas in India (Pradhan 2012). The AIGL led the entire movement to a different level and the Nepali speaking community became conscious of their language and a symbol of identity. "The Gorkhaland movement reached its zenith in 1980 with the growth of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF), led by Subhas Ghising" (Kanwar 2018). The years 1886–1888, which were the most violent in the movement's history to demand a separate state for Gorkhaland, saw significant violence in the struggle under the leadership of the GNLF (Datta 1991). "The GNLF-led movement replaced the call for the construction of a separate state called Gorkhaland with the demand for the self-rule of the Darjeeling district from the state of West Bengal" (Besky 2014).

Subba (1992) argues that the GNLF movement for the demand of Gorkhaland was launched with an eleven-points programme held in a meeting at Ghoom in Darjeeling. The agenda for the eleven points included hoisting the Black Flag on April 13, 1986, as a sign of discrimination against Indian Nepalis, destroying the State Reorganization Committee's report as a show of displeasure over Nepali's exclusion as a language, that prevented the formation of a state for Indian Nepalis, and merging the Darjeeling Hills with West Bengal. The activists further declared that they would burn Article 7 of the "Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950" during their upcoming demonstration. This Article caused the Indian Nepalis to have identity problems because the Treaty did not clearly distinguish between Indian Nepalis and Nepalese citizens. One of the agendas also stressed on boycotting the Parliamentary and State Assembly elections.

The GNLF had adopted three-pronged strategy to achieve the objectives. In the first place, it launched violent movement in Darjeeling and issued calls for the boycott of the national festivals like the Republic days to put pressure on the government at the centre and states to concede its demand. However, the demand for Gorkhaland as a separate state was not acknowledged by the government. After years of intense protest, the West Bengal state government established the "Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council" (DGHC) in 1988 as a sort of autonomous region within the larger state. The DGHC was a powerhouse in Darjeeling's municipal politics for the next two decades (Besky 2014). Datta (1994) argues that the formation of the hill council marked the definite watershed in the history of the response by the state to the regional demand. The hill council in West Bengal however failed to fulfil the demands and the aspiration of the people. The entire system and experimentation were a failed process and later it became a merely a tussle between GNLF and the state government.

"The experiment with the hill council only encountered problems because it failed to live up to the goals that the people had for it. The failure of the DGHC can be directly attributed to the poor management of the organization. The council soon became an organization of power and influence with in grip of both the recently formed local elites, who were led by Ghisingh and his GNLF men. These elites' repressive practices left

almost no political space for opposition, and Ghisingh and his men were in charge of it. Many of those who participated in the survey had the opinion that during the GNLF rule, the expectation for statehood had been reduced to a means of coercing the government into providing more resources” (Lacina 2009). In due course the leadership of Ghisingh faded and in the year 2007 we see the rise of a new political party known as Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM) (Kanwar). The agitation was once again revived under the leadership of Bimal Gurung, he was a former aide of Subash Ghisingh. Though Bimal Gurung announced to lead a non-violent agitation, various indefinite strikes, hunger strikes, tax boycott, and demonstrations led to a paralysis of public life in Darjeeling for next 5 years (Wenner 2018). In order to spread the movement and influence the demand the statehood Gurung extended the influence in Siliguri and the adjoining Dooars region through protest action in the forms of Bandhs, meetings and demonstrations. These led to ethnic conflicts and clashes between the GJMM supporters and the members of the Amra Bangali and Jan Jagran Manch of Siliguri (Ghosh 2009).

According to Middelton (2013), the Gorkhaland movement centered its efforts on attempting to negotiate with the government in exchange for power and financial support, and it mobilized a large number of people by exploiting in terms of "identity crisis." Later the GJMM formed its police force called the Gorkhaland Police Force (GLP) and started to spread their control and their political movements in the Siliguri - Dooars region mainly in Bagrakort, Samsing, Birpara and Kalchini. state. With the coming of the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government in West Bengal in the year 2011, a tripartite meeting was held on 18th august that involved the central government, state government and the GJMM. The final result of the meeting was the formation of Gorkha Territorial Administration (GTA) by overthrowing the DGHC. This had exactly followed the DGHC path in its nature, orientation and structures but with little more autonomy.

Wenner (2018) argues that while the GJMM party and the leader Bimal Gurung were contended with the GTA as they thought it to be a path towards Gorkhaland. However, critics argue that it to be an arrangement exchanged for power and money. On 13th July 2013 with the formation of Telangana state, protests for the demand of

Gorkhaland again sparked out in the hills with indefinite strike of 44 days. Tea gardens, tourism, schools, offices and markets were all closed and the hills were completely shut. All the political parties of the hills had come together and decided to jointly take the movement forward. However, the movement bore no fruits (Kanwar 2018).

In 2017, there was yet another incident that stoked the flames of discontent for the Gorkhaland movement. The primary factor that served as the impetus for the movement was the decision made by the government of West Bengal to mandate the teaching of Bengali in schools from the first grade all the way through the tenth grade. This demonstration evolved into a widespread uprising when organizers called for an ongoing strike that lasted from June 15th to September 25th of 2017.

Gorkhas living in various parts of the world started to organize rallies in favour of Gorkhaland. On 30th July 2017 a global rally for Gorkhaland was formed and rallies were organized in USA, UK, Australia, Hong Kong, Israel and others. Within India major rallies were taken out in the metropolitan state's other few states in the north east. In the course of the movement clashes occurred between the police armed forces and GJMM supporters. The state government while side tracking the GJMM leader Bimal Gurung who initially hid himself in Sikkim and later fled away to Delhi, engaged his own colleagues Binoy Tamang and Anit Thapa and made them the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of GTA 2. The Government funded them profusely and gave all armed protection. The Government put all the agitating leaders and common folks behind bars on the pretext of mostly false and concocted cases. Thus, the third round of Gorkhaland movement also fizzled out because of state government's violent repression, Central Government indifference and apathy (though the Member of Parliament was from the ruling party in the Centre i.e. BJP and most importantly the emergence of traitors among the hill communities. The GTA is now an aimless, useless, ineffective and non-consequential body primarily prolonged by the State Government to buy peace as long as possible. The movement for separate state therefore, could erupt anytime in future in a much fiercer manner thereby affecting the Chicken neck corridor.

3.4 Insurgence in The North East India

India's north eastern states serves as the only physical land access between India, China, and Southeast Asia. However, the region also faces significant challenges as it has become over time a region of turmoil and conflict, leading to significant military deployments throughout the entire region. (Hayes 2012). Hussain (2006) states that the Northeastern region of India is one of the hotbed crisis spots in South Asia. The geo strategic location of the North East region of India makes it the country's weakest link. The entire region though flanked by rich natural resources, it is also associated with a troubled history from the neighbors, neglected population, poor economy, and a very loose contact with the mainland India that makes the entire region entirely cut off from the socio-cultural incorporation from the rest of the part of the country that makes the Siliguri Dooars corridor the most vital land link.

By tradition, there are numerous ethnic tribes living throughout the entire north-eastern region. These tribes are known as schedule tribes and are primarily concentrated in the hill states of Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, as well as the hill districts of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura (Verghese 2004). There has been a significant inter-regional variation in political goals and ethno-social problems. There has been a huge inter-regional dissimilarity in ethno-social issues and political aspirations. The various ethnic tribes possess different culture, tradition and customs and also the economic and political development in these regions varies as the Brahmaputra and Imphal valleys are much developed as compared to the hill regions of these states which has further has led socio and economic disparities among the people of the hills and valleys. (Shimray 2004).

According to Madhab (1999), in spite of the establishment of different states in the north east region of the country in order to fulfil the long-standing ethnic desires of the people, the region is still rife with instability. The government of India has failed to meet the basic aspirations of the people which has led in widening regional differences. The numerous ethnic groups of the north-eastern region. According to Kalita (2011), "people have started to assert their individuality by emphasizing one 's technique to identify allegiances, like their cultural context, linguistic, or faith. This trend can be seen

in many different countries. The restricted achievement or failure of popular movements for "self-governance," "territory," "separate state within or outside Indian union," or "demand for SC/ST classifications," and their transition into rebellious organizations, not only transformed the entire north-eastern part into a powerful base for taking up arms against the nation, however they have also contributed in an outstanding and never-ending assertive dispute between different groups of individuals in the region. This conflict has resulted in the displacement of millions”.

The goals of these many rebel groups go far beyond mere autonomy, however, and include everything from full statehood to control over all aspects of economic development. Although the movements' leaders didn't set out to be militants, the government's failure to meet the demands of the local ethnic communities fueled widespread anger, which ultimately manifested itself in violence (Ghosh 2001). Migrants from Bangladesh have settled in Assam and Tripura, contributing to the instability in the region. Insurgency erupted in Tripura and Assam because of the marginalization of indigenous communities there. As a result, the existing indigenous peoples in Assam and Tripura are now marginal section and have helped spark an uprising. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, and Tripura are particularly hard hit by the immigration-related socio-economic issues that have contributed to the unrest throughout the north east. The native peoples' cultural practices, economies, and resources have all been put in jeopardy by this migration (Weiner 1978).

The All-Assam Students Union started a rebel movement against the migration in the year 1980's which killed almost 2000 people and ended with the Assam Accord of 1985. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) further took control of the movement in 1979, and ever since, the states have only experienced waves and layers of insurgency, with the “Karbi Longri NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF)” and the “Black Widow group (BW)” emerging as the next highest operational fronts. However, the Assam Accord did not provide a solution to the problem (Kalita 2011).

Along with these three, a number of other groups occasionally launched attacks. In the year 1990 and 2000 ULFA had taken a different turn and was hard for the government of India to negotiate with them. The insurgent groups further started building

connections with the neighboring countries such as Bangladesh and further promoted cross border terrorism. The year 2007 and 2008 saw the worst years of insurgency when the NDFB carried out serial bomb blasts that targeted the civilians, this incident marked a transition from insurgency to terrorism and also led to the discovery of terrorist camps along the border with Bhutan and Bangladesh (Mathur 2011). According to Upadhyay (2006), the unrest in the north-eastern region includes rebellions for separation and self-government and conflicts based on ethnicity that has been brought on by the ongoing influx of migrants. He further states that the conflicts in this region can be assessed around four distinct lines tribal group versus the state for a distinct and separate nation, tribal versus tribal (these conflicts which are generated as a result of the less dominant groups against the dominant tribal groups), tribal versus non tribal movements which demand political reorganization to sub nationality aspirations. Bhaumick (2007) argues that this ongoing problem of political unrest in the North east states has made the Siliguri Dooars corridor more vulnerable as number of insurgent groups, the rebels from North East has been using the corridor for weapon smuggling and cross border terrorism. Kalita (2011) asserts that "these insurgent groups haven't really advanced in a representatively. It is a common assertion made by some indigenous organizations, or at the very least a segment of the indigenous community as a whole, that the only people who are entitled to constitutional and political rights are those who are members of an indigenous community. As a consequence of this, they have a propensity to devalue non-indigenous people, which provides a justification for refusing to accept their rights and liberties as well as committing violent brutalities against them and this in turn eventually leads to a process of ethnic clashes.

The notable ethnic tensions among Hmars and Dimasas, Karbis and Kukis, Karbis and Khasis, and Karbis and Dimasas, in addition to the increasing tensions between a large number of other communities, have attracted the interest of citizens from all over world. These movements have become entangled in the bloody ethnic conflict that has been going on in the district of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills. These uprisings only show us one side of the story. Despite the fact that development being a serious concern in the north-eastern regions, the administration has only used armed organizations that have committed human rights violations against the civilian population

in order to put a stop to the movements. These organizations have been used by the administration. The people are unhappy and disillusioned with the way the government is dealing with the insurgency. Ethnic minorities claim that they are the targets of governmental injustice, and many people believe that the population of the Northeastern region of India has not benefited nearly enough from India's economic development and progress (Hayes 2012).

Shimary (2004) argues that the current socio-political problems in the north east region have created distress in the corridor and the adjoining region, it has also threatened India's internal security. However, these issues are not addressed politically or in a democratic manner but by imposing Armed Forces Special Powers act 1958⁷. India is home to one of the largest armies that is still active in the world today. The Act provides the Indian army with the authority to violently repress insurgent groups as well as the people who violently supported those groups. There have been a large number of extrajudicial killings and disappearances in the states of Nagaland, Manipur, and Assam, including not only militants but also political figures, protesters, and regular residents. As a result of open hostilities with the armed forces, there have been casualties, and this has led to phony encounters. Accessibility and passage of weapons through the permeable border from the neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh, is one of the most significant threats and vulnerabilities that the insurgents in the north east have created in the Siliguri Dooars corridor. This is one of the areas that the insurgents have targeted. The majority of the financial and military assistance that these insurgent groups have received has come from Bangladesh. However, there have been reports that China has also supplied Nagaland with small arms. (Kalita 2011)

3.5 Illegal Cross-Border Migration

Immigration across Borders for people from Bangladesh and Nepali Maoist militants, the Siliguri-Dooars corridor has been a focal area for illicit cross-border migration. The corridor has evolved into a refuge for both the insurgent groups in the

⁷ The Armed Forces Special power act currently has been partially withdrawn from 13 police station areas in seven districts of Nagaland. 15 police station and 7 districts of Manipur and 23 entirely and one district partially in Assam. However, it still remains in some parts of these states as well as in parts of Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

north east and the Indian insurgents. This has brought about regional political instability in the region and has hindered the regions socio-economic development (Malik 2015). In the recent years the corridor has evolved to become home for many migrants coming from across the borders of Bangladesh, in the last few decades Siliguri has experienced a large influx of migrants and has created a rapid urban growth (Debnath and Ray 2017). Malik (2015) argues Siliguri to be a town in transit as the region evolves with its increasing population. The transit character of the corridor in the dual sense of being transitional has evolved over a time.

3.5.1 Cross-border Migration from Bangladesh

Mathur (2011) argues that the crisis of cross border migration can be traced back to the liberation of Bangladesh in the year 1971. With the modification of the political boundaries of independent India, the immigration process from Bangladesh became illegal. This led to a massive arrival of people from Bangladesh, which generated a significant issue throughout the Siliguri corridor and the north-eastern states of India. As a result, the native population felt less safe and saw their demographic, cultural, and linguistic identities distorted. The history of Bangladesh's partition and independence in 1971 is linked to the current crisis of illegal immigration. India's and Bangladesh's border is 4,176 kilometres long, making it the fifth longest in the world. The corridor is threatened not only by the influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, but also by the criminality of human trafficking from both Bangladesh and Nepal. According to reports from India's Narcotics Control Bureau, the area around the corridor is routinely searched for and seized by authorities. Stolen goods, primarily vehicles from India, are transported through the Siliguri corridor and sold in Bangladesh (Rahmati et al. 2020).

Although this problem has been looming for generations, India has not been able to prevent illegal immigration, as reported by Mayilvaganan (2019). Immigration from Bangladesh is a long-standing problem that has become both a demographic and a national security concern. Bangladeshi territory is located on both sides of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor, because of this, the entire corridor region is at risk from illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and other militant exercises, such as the smuggling of arms and narcotics across borders (Upadhayay 2004). Haokip (2011) writes that "there are two

main types of uncontrolled migration to India's north-eastern states: migrants from within India and migration from outside India". According to Weiner, "internal and external conflicts are more likely to cause severe socioeconomic problems in a multicultural developing country such as India."

3.5.2 Impacts of Cross-Border Migration

The entire north-eastern region geopolitically shares large international border and hence has been prone to huge influx of illegal migrants coming from Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh and Myanmar. The 1980's recorded periods of riots between the Bodos and the migrants from Bangladeshi. The influx of migrants from Bangladesh has led to *3Ds- Detect, Delete and Deport* and ethnic clashes. The inclusion of Chakma in the electoral list and the refugee problem in Arunachal Pradesh, the infiltration of Reang into the Mizoram state, the ethnic crisis in Tripura has threatened the socio cultural and socio-economic system in these states. This has further led to danger and fear of assimilation among the original and indigenous people living in the region. (Shimary 2004).

According to Upadhyay (2004), the entire process of the migrant inflow has caused the political, social, economic, sectarian, and ethnic tension in the entire region to become unstable. It has also contributed to the emergence of violent actions, extremism, and a network of fundamentalist movements with access to armaments. The effective administration and operation of the border, on the other hand, have proven to be a significant obstacle for India, which has resulted in the states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura and Mizoram being in an extremely precarious position. The border runs through the middle of many communities' centers, and as a result, one house can be found in Bangladesh while the other can be found in India. For example, more than one hundred villages in the state of West Bengal are located directly on the international boundary line, and many of the homes in these villages have one door opening into India and the other door opening into Bangladesh (Kumar, 2005). The government of India has made an effort to control the situation at the border by erecting a wire fence along it and stationing security personnel, such as the Border Security Force (BSF), who have been manning the border between India and Bangladesh. Because of this, regulating and police work at the border has become significantly more difficult.

Through the proliferation of Islamic activities in the region, Bangladesh has also made the strategic borders of Northeast India more vulnerable, which has direct repercussions for India's secular space in that region (Saikia 2003). Assam is the state that is being most significantly impacted by the population influx. Another Indian state that has been impacted by the influx of migrants from Bangladesh is West Bengal, which shares a border with that country. And over five million Bangladeshi Muslims are believed to be living here illegally in West Bengal (Mayilvagnan 2019).

The efforts made by the Indian government to evaluate and regulate illegal immigration across the border continue to be woefully inadequate. Despite the fact that India has enacted a number of laws and regulations, including the “Foreigners Act and the Unlawful Migrants Act” of 1983, to locate and expel illegal migrants from the country. Since 1987, as a consequence of the Assam Accord, the Indian government has indeed been erecting a fence along the border between India and Bangladesh. In addition, India has taken measures to construct border roads and “Border Out Posts (BOPs)”, as well as install floodlights and high-tech surveillance equipment. The spillover effects of the ethnic conflicts in Assam, as well as the recurrent violent clashes between Bodo and Muslim migrants who speak Bengali and the adivasis, are also contributing to a law-and-order problem in the bordering districts of Alipurduar and Cooch Bihar in North Bengal. These districts are located on the state's border with Assam (tea tribes). The safety of the Chicken neck corridor is being compromised as a result of this. Because of the high number of different ethnic groups and the wide variety of sociocultural contexts, the ethnoreligious situation is extremely complicated. The area has been experiencing a rise in the number of social movements that are rooted in based on ethnic cultural and political organizations (Shimray 2004).

Nevertheless, India continues to have a significant number of issues to resolve before it will be able to effectively manage its borders. Because of the country's hilly and porous topography, it can be challenging to keep constant roads and highways and conduct effective patrolling in India. India also faces a significant challenge in locating undocumented illegal immigrants. Even though the government has taken steps, like modifying the National Register of Citizens (NRC), by the Assam Government under the

watchful eye of the Supreme Court, it is very difficult to identify them or return them because there has been no documentation of the illegal entry or their presence in any of the bordering areas. Even though the government has taken steps, like modifying the National Register of Citizens (NRC), by the Assam Government under the supervision of the Supreme Court. As a result of the fact that many undocumented immigrants have enrolled their names as Indian citizens under a variety of government categories, the NRC update process has also been called into question. As a consequence of this, in the absence of statistics that are accurate and reliable, it is difficult to determine the precise scope of the existence of illegal migrants. Lastly, the Indian government finds it difficult to effectively combat the problem due to Bangladesh's undesirable outlook and non-cooperative method toward illegal migration. Both of these factors contribute to the issue of illegal migration (Mayilvaganan 2019).

3.5.3 Changes in Demographics

According to Yamnam (2016) the Siliguri-Dooars corridor had always been seen as being secluded from the national politics and the social attentiveness this isolation is marked because of the civilization difference between the “hill tribes” and the “advance Indic civilization” the two being culturally and racially different. Bhattacharya (2012) has stated that the Britishers used Darjeeling as a site of medicalized leisure and rejuvenation from the tropical climate. The expansion of the tea estates in the surrounding areas allowed the hill station of Darjeeling to remain viable by being integrated into the greater imperial economy. The first regular census of the districts of 1871-72 shows a population of about 94,712 the average density of person being 81 per square mile. When the next census was taken the population had increased by 63 percent. The increase in the population can be attributed to two factors, first was the setting up of the tea industry and the influx of inhabitants. The preceding account states that the population influx was also due to large immigration in the Terai region from the adjoining districts of Purnea and Jalpaiguri. A large number of coolies also came from the Chota Nagpur plateau and the Santal Praganas. However, majority of influx was from Nepal as the trans-Tibet trade encouraged immigration from Nepal. (Bhattacharya 2012)

Hence, we can see that the entire region of the Darjeeling District and the Terai region had become a melting pot with a blend of diverse ethnicity and culture. Campbell (1862) while working on the Tribes around Darjeeling states the population to be exceedingly diverse, majority of the hill people to be of Mongolian origin which comprised of Lepchas, Bhutias, Tibetans, Khus, Magars, Gurungs, Limboos, Chepangs. Along with these hill tribe the Terai region equally had mixture of races comprising of the aboriginal Koches or Rajbansis and also the Mundas and the Oraons from Chota Nagpur plateau and Santals from the uplands from the Santal Praganas. Later the region witnessed the coming of the Marwari merchants, Bengali clerks, Hindustani mechanics and the Punjabi traders (Campbell 1862).

3.6 Cross Border Trafficking and Smuggling

3.6.1 Human Trafficking

Cross border human trafficking has been one of the major challenges that the corridor is facing today. According to Bales (2005), the ease of international trade and economic globalization have significantly increased the amount of people being trafficked across state lines. Bangladesh and Nepal have been a major source country for human trafficking and India's Siliguri corridor the main junction from where the trafficked women and children are further transported and taken into forced labour and commercial sex. India has about twenty check posts with Bangladesh and fourteen legal entry points with Nepal as they have an open border policy. All of these make trafficking of both humans and weapons easier and difficult to identify. India has been a key destination country for all the persons coming from Bangladesh and Nepal. The 2010 Trafficking in Persons Report has pointed out that ninety percent of the trafficked people belonged to the most underprivileged groups and that the girls were deceived with promises of jobs and forcing them into prostitution as well as forced marriages. In the state of Haryana girls are in high demand for marriages due to their low sex ratio (Thomas 2011).

Minors are mostly the victims for sex tourism. These girls are promised with a better job in big cities and also promised fake marriages, a trend that has been going for

trafficking. Of late there has also been rise in trafficking for domestic help, construction workers, cheap labor, skin trade and organ harvesting. Nepal remains as one of the top countries in South Asia with the burden of the number of girls trafficked. The earthquake of 2015 in Nepal adversely affected the economic sector of the country and also led to a huge rise in human trafficking in search of better livelihood (SSB report). Human trafficking in India from Nepal and Bangladesh has mostly been done for sexual exploitation and forced labour, commercial sex has been rising in the South Asian countries (Rahman 2015) According to the United Nations 100,00-200,00 Nepali trafficked women are living in Indian brothels. Trafficking is unproblematic here due to open and unregulated border. The US State Departments report on trafficking has pointed out that extensive fraud among law enforcement officials in India is creating hindrance to the measures made for combating trafficking.

Horrifying trafficking of another nature has not been highlighted much, many girls from Nepal are trafficked for selling their skin to be used in the “global cosmetic market”. The most important location is in Mumbai. The girls are then brought to the designated location where they are each given a "price" that is determined by their age, the fairness of their skin, and whether or not they are virgins. A block of white skin measuring one hundred inches square can fetch up to one hundred thousand rupees when sold in Mumbai. The more porcelain-like the girl's complexion seems to have been, the more expensive the price she commanded. This price reflects how highly a fair complexion is valued in the cosmetics industry and the black market (Deccan Chronical, 2017). According to the Anti Trafficking Bureau of Nepal the Chinese men pay huge amount to marry Nepali women. This is mainly due to the low sex ratio in China. The gender gap has made it problematic for the men in China to find wives hence the girls from Nepal are being trafficked to China and Korea (Dhungana 2019). There have been many cases where Humans from Nepal has also been trafficked for organs as well. The poor economic conditions of the people could be the prime factor for such voluntary acts. Most of the kidney donors were contacted through middlemen (Patkar 2017). According to Bales (2005), the ease of international trade and economic globalization have significantly increased the amount of people being trafficked across state lines. Thomas (2011) highlights that the failure of the laws dealing with trafficking his main argument is

on the issue that human trafficking has to be checked by a regional cooperation and not individually as Nation states. The open international border of India, Nepal and Bangladesh has made human trafficking very easy via the Siliguri corridor which acts as a main junction for trafficking. There is a strong need to have a strict vigil on the trafficking and coordinate with the civil societies and the NGO's and awareness program among the border population and policies. (SSB report)

3.6.2 Narcotics and Weapon Trafficking

For some time now, militant groups like the “United Liberation Front of Assam and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland” have been using this corridor as a passageway, increasing security forces' worries about the area. A major issue in the northeastern states is the proliferation of drug and weapon trafficking along the Siliguri-Dooars corridor (Ghosh 2016). The widespread illegal trade all along India-Bangladesh border is another consequence of illegal migration from Bangladesh. Numerous reports detail the involvement of middlemen in the smuggling and trafficking of goods like grain, meat, silk sarees, people, and drugs across this porous border. It has also been suggested that border guards and the traffickers they encounter at the Indo-Bangladesh border have some sort of relationship. As a result of the rise of the prostitute industry in cities across India, including Kolkata and Mumbai, women and girls are increasingly at risk of being trafficked (India Today, 2017).

One of the main factors contributing to the violent conflict in the northeast region is the accessibility and flow of armaments from nearby nations across the porous border. Indian immigrants in Malaysia have also been providing financial support to the rebels. Like some other rebel groups in southern Asia, the Assam insurgents likely obtain assault weapons through interconnected narcotic and unauthorized arms trade. Furthermore, some reports suggest that insurgent groups steal numerous firearms from law enforcement. The Indian government accuses Bhutan and Bangladesh of arming insurgent groups inside India. Insurgents in Nagaland allegedly received small arms from China, according to reports. In 2004, allegations resurfaced that illegal weapons were being smuggled to the rebel groups in India's northeast, following the discovery of a huge arms database in Bangladesh that was assumed to be headed for that region. Among the

ten thousand weapons and ten thousand rounds of ammunition in the cache were a number of grenades. This cache was one of many that had been taken this year in Bangladesh, and its discovery sparked fears that the rebel forces were better armed than had been previously believed (Kalita 2011).

3.6.3 Wildlife smuggling

Sarkar (2013) argues that there have been lucrative cases of cattle smuggling in the corridor region. The biodiversity of the corridor is such that it runs from deep North-eastern jungle areas to the foot hills of North Bengal. The region hosts more than six reserved forests and many unreserved ones. The corridor's close vicinity with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh borders has developed to become an ideal conduit for the smugglers. The West Bengal Forest Department has reported cases of illegal trading of Red Sand Boa snakes, Pangolin scales, Tiger Skins and Elephant tusks from the NER to Nepal and Bangladesh. According to Banka (2021) wildlife smuggling along the Indo-Bangladesh border in the recent time has seen a steep rise. There has been a frequent rise in the smuggling of birds with white neck, black plumage and long beaks. Recent cases of smuggling of reptiles. The Siliguri-Dooars corridor has also reported cases of teak and timber smuggling. Officials have reported the corridor to be thriving with timber smugglers. There have been cases of teak timber smuggling worth Rs 20 lakh from Fulbari near Siliguri that had been smuggled from Arunachal Pradesh (The statesman 2021).

3.7 Biodiversity Hotspot

Beautiful scenery, mountains, and rivers line the Siliguri-Dooars corridor, adding to the region's topographical richness and population diversity. The vastness and wealth of the dense forests in the entire region of Darjeeling and the surrounding areas. Hooker (1854) in his accounts of multiple botanizing expeditions in the eastern Himalayas, Sikkim and Tibet made the outside world aware of the region's beauty and floral diversity. Additionally, it serves as a gateway to the nation's biotope with the greatest diversity. Kalimpong, West Bengal is home to Neora Valley National Park, home to one of the eastern region's richest biological zones. Both Darjeeling and Kalimpong District

are entirely mountainous, with varying altitudes across their many mountain ranges. Vegetation levels have been found to correlate positively with elevation. Thus, altitude is a significant factor in determining the range of altitudes over which different plant species are found together and in what associations they form. Large swaths of temperate and cold-temperate forests have been cleared to make way for agricultural development like tea, cinchona, and cardamom plantations (Hooker 1854).

Darjeeling is a popular tourist destination and a major producer of high-quality tea because of its beautiful natural setting, which includes dense jungles, abundant flora and fauna, and geological areas like mountains and rivers. Also, this is a prime location for the most powerful landslides on the planet. According to Geological Survey of India, 12.6% of India's total landmass is prone to landslides, particularly in the eastern and western Himalayan Mountain range (Beskey 2017). Terrorism and other criminal activities, such as smuggling, have stunted development in a number of sectors, despite the region's strategic importance and rich biodiversity (Malik 2105).

3.8 The threat from China

According to Walcott (2010), the governmental, financial, and social stability of the areas all along Mountain ranges between China and India is under siege from a number of interconnected threats. The Siliguri corridor, which links the north-eastern part of India to the country's main peninsula, has always existed in an extremely vulnerable geostrategic and safety position due to its unusual topography. Given its strategic location, it is particularly sensitive to external dangers from China, which has begun a large military transformation programme (Bhattacharjee 2015).

According to Walcott (2010), "the external aspects in this region, illustrates the entire geopolitics of this narrow stretch of land." The Chumbi valley of Tibet separates Bhutan and India's Sikkim, and the Siliguri-Dooars corridor runs through West Bengal (Siliguri-Dooars Corridor). The intensification of China's already substantial interest in the Chumbi valley region presents a significant challenge to. China's growing control in the progression of road near the border areas includes the Chumbi Valley north of

Doklam. This area is located at the tri junction of India (Sikkim), Bhutan, and China (Tibet), which creates in the fear here that in the near future if China gets hold of the Chumbi valley region then they can easily deploy military forces to block the Chicken Neck Corridor which is at the south of Doklam and cut off Bhutan, a part of West Bengal.

According to Satter's (2020) interpretation, China has indeed laid claim to about 83,743 ha of land in Arunachal Pradesh. The corridor has been under constant danger as a result of it. The Chinese government has maintained its claim that the state of Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of the Tibet Autonomous region even though it shares borders with Arunachal Pradesh. People with Monpa ancestry live in the western part of the state, Tani people live in the state's centre, Tai people live in the state's east, and Naga people live in the southern part of the state. The infrastructure projects, such as roads and bridges, that China has begun in the Doklam plateau are the primary source of concern for India. Because China's strategic securities near the Doklam plateau have expanded over the years, the road from Lhasa to Yadong, which is located near the mountain range, has been advanced. This has allowed the 500-kilometer journey to be completed in seven hours, which is a significant time savings. If the road is connected to Yadong, it would further enhance China's accessibility to get a hold of the Siliguri Dooars corridor. In addition, China has extended the Beijing-Lhasa high-speed railway line to Yadong. This has further enhanced Chinese military supply chain in the region opposite the corridor.

However, the Siliguri-Dooars corridor is one of the most crucial economic zones of the Indian subcontinent, as most of the commercial trade between Southeast Asian nations are done through this region. Strategically it is very crucial for India being a major stake holder at the same time major threats discussed above have made the corridor a vulnerable one. Never the less India should use the corridor as a vital developmental opportunity for the entire sub-region and also for regional peace, integration, stability and prosperity.

CHAPTER 4

TURNING SILIGURI-DOOARS CORRIDOR INTO SUB-REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Introduction

Amidst all the security challenges and concerns that have been discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter attempts to explore the great potential that the Siliguri-Dooars corridor holds to bring about major future prospects for India and the sub-region. The chapter further discusses about the sub regional opportunities that the corridor provides and the various sub regional instruments to achieve these opportunities, such as BBIN-MVA (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement), BCIM EC, Asian Highway and also a major focus on how the corridor can prove to be beneficial for India's Act East policy as it is the main stakeholder of the corridor.

India's geographical location and position in South Asia makes it strategically important for having a vital link with all the states in the sub region, its strategic area has helped it to serve as a link between South Asian economies such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan (the two land locked countries). This has further led to an increase in an emergent with the South East Asian nations, India's North Eastern region have played a pivot role for this changing political backdrop that has led to a positive bilateral relation and has further opened up the prospects of sub-regional connectivity projects (Datta 2017)

Promoting corridors as regional links between landlocked countries and their neighbours has proven to be an important way to engage in hindrances and competitiveness. South Asia's economic corridors envision lowering trade costs, which would lead to an increase in investment and trade (Asian Developmental Bank 2014).

The Siliguri-Dooars corridor in India can also be a plus point for regional cooperation between India-Bangladesh. With the recent opening of the 'Banglabandha-Pulbari' checkpoint, Bangladesh will have easy access to the corridor to connect with Nepal and Bhutan, further enhancing regional projects such as BIMSTEC and BBIN the Chicken neck corridor can be used as an asset rather than a liability (Bhaumik et al 2016:3)

4.2 Siliguri-Dooars Corridor- Creating Sub Regional Identity

The Siliguri-Dooars corridor is responsible for creating subregional identity by incorporating strategic commercial and cultural regions of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. According to Shukla (2019), India's vast size, human capital, developing economy, and strong commitment to regional integration of economies have made it the focal point of the South Asian subregional campaigning initiative. The significance of this subregion is emphasized in the following paragraph.

4.2.1 The Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal (BBIN) Sub-region

The South Asian sub region consists of Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India. One of the salient features of this sub region is the presence of two landlocked countries (Bhutan and Nepal)

The Siliguri-Dooars corridor provides a great opportunity for increasing inclusivity and sustainability of transport and transit connectivity between Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh sub-region. This corridor has increased accessibility in these land locked countries. The corridor acts as a medium of having transit access to the ports of Bangladesh and India. Furthermore, the corridor region has been highlighted as being one of the most essential intersections in the “Asian Highway-2”, which serves as a crossroads in between highway and the “Asian Highway-48”, which integrates India and Bhutan (The World Bank 2019)

As modern transportation corridors are essential for regional trade, they directly affect the rural lives. The corridor has a huge potential to increase the economic activity for the people in the sub region and help materialize an inclusive transport led growth for the region with India's north eastern region at its center.

4.2.2 Economic Opportunities

India's neighboring countries Bhutan, Nepal which are landlocked and Bangladesh rely heavily on Siliguri-Dooars as a transit corridor for trade and transportation with each other. The corridor acts a junction to access ports of Bangladesh and India for international trade and connectivity that has paved the way for growth and development of the sub region. Good connectivity in sub-regional countries would boost the trade, transportation of goods and people, resources, energy, culture, ideas etc.

According to Haran (2018), regional trade agreements have emerged as an effective catalyst for boosting economic assimilation and economic expansion in the part of the region over the last 60 years. This has resulted in an increase in job opportunities and an improvement in the region's welfare programmes. "The geographical location of Siliguri is such that in the west Nepal lies about 10 km away from Bagdogra, Bhutan in the north east about 40 km away, China to the north about 180 km ay Nathu La in Sikkim and Bangladesh to the South at Phulbari. This strategic location of the corridor has made it a base for all the essential supplies to all these neighboring countries of the sub region" (Ghosh 2016).

Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan have made extensive use of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor for transportation and commercial purpose. It has developed the region through transportation-led growth, with India's North Eastern region playing a significant role. The South Asian sub-region has seen increased momentum for economic cooperation of the region (e.g., 'the South Asia free trade area and the South Asia growth quadrangle concepts').

The corridor has been extremely beneficial in terms of domestic and international trade facilitation. The location is critical for inbound and outbound freight cargo, as well as the transportation of essential goods such as coal and petroleum from the North East region to the neighboring nations of Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. The fact that the North-Eastern states received FDI equity of USD 94 billion in 2015-16 demonstrates the significance of overall business and commerce in the region. Trade routes such as the Indo-Bangladesh trade protocol routes, the East West corridor, and the Trans-Asian Highway have increased the value of the corridor (IWAI 2016).

4.2.3 Transport Connectivity

Inter-modal connectivity and transportations in the corridor region has been very crucial for the whole of North Bengal, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan. With respect to road connectivity between India and Bhutan the border town of Jaigaon in the district of Alipurduar is a majorly used. Jaigaon, which is located opposite Phuentsholing in Bhutan, is accessible via routes from both Alipurduar and Cooch Behar. People utilize the route from Siliguri to Kakarbhitta for connectivity between India and Nepal. Along the Indo-Bangladesh border, several points for access are there such as Changrabandha, Bamanhat, Hili and Fulbari. The Northern Frontier Railway serves as the head of the rail for Nepal and Bhutan, and gives Bangladesh connectivity facilities with North Bengal.

The Bagdogra airport (North Bengal, Kolkata, Guwahati, and other locations in India) and New Jalpaiguri Railway station that is located in Siliguri have been utilized not only by the people of North Bengal, but also by the people coming from Dhulabari, Kakarvitta, and Bittamore across the Mechi river (Ghosh 2016).

Bhattacharjee (2015) argues that the Siliguri- Dooars corridor has an elaborate network of National highways and rail networks. The National Highway (NH31) connects the region of Jalpaiguri from Cooch Behar in West Bengal to Guwahati. He further argues that the Indian government in the year 2012 has recommended to upgrade the key highway from Siliguri to Sikkim through constructions of modern methods of tunnelling and bridging the valleys that can be suited for all weather conditions. In terms of water course connectivity, the National Waterway 2 runs through the state of Assam and further connects to the region of West Bengal through Indo- Bangladesh Trade Protocol route (IWAI 2017).

A distinct economic corridor is emerging connecting border towns, trade centers, inland waterways, land and neighboring sea ports of sub-regional nations with India through north-eastern region. The pith of connectivity via road, railways, waterways, airways, trade centres etc. should be seamlessly interwoven for holistic development of this region. This in turn has to be reinforced by a strong inter-modal information network

including on passenger transports, ticketing, freights and cargo movements, tag and toll systems and a series of conventions and agreements facilitating its success. Given the geography, the issues of truck efficiency, engines and cleaner fuels, quality all weather roads and hinterland and last mile connections (Lama 2020).

4.2.4 Socio-cultural opportunities

Pal (2013) “argues that South Asia as a sub-region despite having a bond of shared history and culture are not well integrated. Despite these differences created by political and geography bifurcation there still exists a strong socio-anthropological tie. These ties can be rekindled by accessing the corridor. India and Nepal share a common cultural values and traditions and hence it can be seen that common cultural festivals and marriages has been shared across the border”.

Mishra and Das (2020) argue that historically, culture and education have provided vital links of connection between India, Nepal, and Bhutan. According to the historical texts of foreign travelers, ancient scholars from the subregion were attracted to Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila. They further argue that various political leaders from Nepal and Bhutan too have received their education from India. India has emerged as one of the world's leading providers of higher education, attracting students from Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. Students hail from Nepal at a rate of 26.88 percent, Bangladesh at 4.38 percent, and Bhutan at 3.83 percent⁸. In addition, they assert that numerous political leaders from Nepal and Bhutan received their education in India.

The corridor has also grown as a prime city that has provided health and educational opportunities for people living on either side of the border (Ghosh 2016). Many students from Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh come to India to study in schools located in Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri. They also come to India to have an access to various management courses and vocational courses.

⁸ All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-2019 (New Delhi: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India 2019), see the section on 'Key Results of the AISHE 2018-19, p. II.

Mishra and Das (2020) argue further that cooperation in education between India and Bangladesh seems to have been powerful in West Bengal because of its proximity to Bangladesh and historical and cultural ties towards the region. After Bangladesh's liberation in 1971, numerous institutions in West Bengal and Bangladesh have organized student exchange programmes and collaborative research initiatives. Bhutan and Nepal also access the corridor for health opportunities. Siliguri as a region has boomed into hospitality industry. The region provides ones of the best health facilities provided by several multi-specialist hospitals. The people from Nepal and Bhutan mostly come to Siliguri for their medical check-ups and treatments.

4.2.5 Environmental opportunities

The Siliguri-Dooars corridor region lying on the foothills of the Himalayas is located at surroundings of beautiful greenery and rivers. Siliguri is a gateway to the Northeast and Nepal and Dooars is the gateway to Bhutan. The region is one of a primary hub of tourists' destination. The region has several National Parks and Sanctuaries for the tourists to explore such as the Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary that is famous for one horned rhino, Gorumara National Park and Buxa Tiger reserve. The region's climate is very conducive for the cultivation of tea; therefore, the corridor region has a lot of tea plantation. The region is also susceptible to earthquakes and landslides due to its proximity to numerous fault lines. The area has experienced numerous landslides and earthquakes.

Despite the impressive opportunities presented by this corridor there still remains many threats which could led to instability in the region. Any instability in the corridor would lead to major problems in transportation and connectivity not just for India but also the dependent neighboring countries such as Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh. In order to realize these various sub-regional opportunities, there needs to be a focused approach on certain sub-regional instruments. There still remains multiple untapped potential which could strengthen the ties among the four countries. In the following section these various sub-regional instruments would be elaborated on.

4.3 Bangladesh Bhutan India Nepal-Motor Vehicle Agreement (BBIN-MVA)

Despite sharing historical and cultural ties, Pal (2016) argues that South Asian countries' integration is one of the weakest. The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) subregional initiative aims to enhance economic cooperation and connectivity between the four South Asian nations. Barthakur (2016) opines that BBIN sub region has a vast geostrategic and economic importance as the region has a potential to develop the connectivity among the countries with enhance trade, transshipments and the movement of the people.

Various initiatives on connectivity implemented by multiple regions, such as the 'Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN), have encouraged South Asian nations in the field of integrating the subregions. The 2015 implementation of the 'BBIN MVA (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal) MVA (Motor Vehicle Agreement)' is a prime example of the sub-regional connectivity initiative. Four nations, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal, signed the "BBIN MVA" project on June 15, 2014.

This project has a prospect of a high point development for India's Siliguri-Dooars corridor as well as for the other countries associated with it. The agreement permits seamless movements of vehicles belonging to member states in order to carry out transportation of cargos and passengers in each other's territories as well as facilitate trade which has emerged as one of the most vital instruments for the regional integration of the entire sub region of South Asia as a whole (CUTS 2017). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has supported and developed this regional initiative as part of the South Asia Sub Regional Economic Cooperation Programme (Pal 2016)

First and foremost, this initiative is noteworthy because it will significantly improve trade between Bhutan and Nepal, two countries that are geographically isolated from the rest of the world. In addition, the BBIN MVA will have a major positive impact on India's northeast. "Incorporation in South Asia will be facilitated further by an integrated road and rail network in the BBIN countries, which will help reduce trade costs and informal trade. With this initiative, transporting goods across the region will be much simpler. The BBIN MVA also has the potential to foster the growth of regional

value chains (RVCs) in South Asia. The initiative also holds the potential to greatly stimulate the trade in various services, especially tourism, among the BBIN countries by making cross-border movement easier. In addition, the MVA is in line with the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) South Asia Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation Initiatives (SASEC)” (Sharma and Rathore 2015 :19)

Map 4.1 Map of BBIN MVA



Source: <https://www.firstpost.com/india/bhutans-upper-house-blocks-bbin-mva-pact-is-it-a-strategic-setback-for-india-3112034.html>

4.3.1 Main objectives of BBIN MVA project

The main objective of this sub regional agreement is to facilitate regional integration and economic development in South Asia. The Siliguri-Dooars corridor will be benefitting huge development and revenue connecting with the neighboring countries of Nepal and Bhutan as the two-land route

- Bhutan- Phuentsholing- Jaigoan- Burimari- Mongla/ Chittagon (Bangladesh)
- Katmandu- Kakaravitta- Phulbari- Banglabandha- Mongla

Passes through the corridor, hence it is going to be of a great strategic importance (Bhattacharya 2014).

The inadequate transportation facilities and weak inter-governmental cooperation and integration has obstructed the prospective of *trade and transportation* in the Indian subcontinent mainly due to the historical, political and economic reasons. Bhutan and Nepal being a landlocked country entirely depend on India for transportation passage and also on the Indian coast for international trade, hence the agreement of the BBIN MVA is projected to significantly enhance the functioning of vehicular movement for goods and passengers crossways (The Asian Journal 2016).

Reddy (2016) states that the primary concern of the BBIN MVA is to promote smooth functioning of cross border transportation of cargo and goods and further led to regional integration and a decrease in the cost of trade transaction and a speedier transportation of cargo and also deepen people to people interaction and contact that would further spurge and boost tourism in the sub region. Since the current state of roads, railways, and other trade-related infrastructure is so poor, the BBIN MVA agreement is seen as part of the effort to "economically integrate" the sub-region. More opportunities for international and domestic trade and investment will be made possible thanks to the Agreement's efforts to create a unified market. Furthermore, it will facilitate cross-border investments between companies, thereby bolstering regional value chains (CUTS 2017). According to Pal (2016), the goal of the "BBIN MVA" is to increase trade and cooperation among the four South Asian countries that make up the "BBIN". Since insufficient intra-regional investment and mobility factors have contributed to the region's low level of integration, the regional initiative is especially important for the least developed bordering countries such as Bhutan and Nepal to gain access to regional and international markets.

The implementation of "BBIN MVA" creates an institutional mechanism of greater regional integration due to increased transportation among the associated countries currently the entry and exit points of the borders of the South Asian countries are over congested. Due to the lack of integration of the transport system in South Asia, the existing 'cross-border trades' via land ports have been inefficient and complicated due

to constant border hassle, over congestion, and high transportation costs. However, now that four countries have signed the BBIN-MVA, the flow of passenger, personal, and cargo vehicles through land ports will be streamlined, reducing transportation costs and boosting economic growth and development in the area (Karim and Quamral 2015). The Asian Development Bank study has identified seven of the suggested South Asian Corridors in the BBIN area, out of a total of ten. These trade corridors will connect Nepal and Bhutan's landlocked commercial centers to the port facilities in both Bangladesh and India. It is possible to reach the ports of Chittagong and Mongla in Bangladesh from Tripura, as well as the port of Ashugunj in Bangladesh.

Despite having a lot in common culturally, the SAARC countries have not been very successful at trading with one another. Against this backdrop, an initiative like BBIN MVA could be a game changer, advancing not only trade but also for the connectivity of people and bringing about development in all of India's North East Corridor region, including the Siliguri Dooars (Ghosh 2017). The “BBIN MVA” agreement would enable an increase in the exchange of *traffic rights* on mutual basis that allows operating the movement of vehicles from one's own country into the land of the destination country. It improves connectivity and takes on the problem of removing international trade and transit barriers. The BBIN MVA is a rising game-changer in its field of operation across the entire sub region, thanks to its precise foundations and powerful performance (Reddy 2016).

According to Banerjee (2016) the most prominent success of the agreement of the BBIN MVA is between the Bangladeshi *readymade garments sector (RGM) and wool industry* of Gujarat and Ludhiana in India. The path has proven to be an effective and economical means of addressing the production's connectivity requirements. Connectivity costs between industrial clusters in Eastern, Southern, and Western India and the North-Eastern States could be greatly reduced thanks to BBIN-MVA. Shipping Indian freight vehicles through Bangladesh to reach the North Eastern states would be a huge time and cost saver; however, the issue of shipping Indian cargo through Bangladesh remains administratively complex, and there are still questions about shipping fees and policy, as well as transit issues related to accurate procedures of the customs.

As with the rest of India, the northeastern part of the country stands to gain a great deal from the BBIN MVA and rail network initiatives. The Northeastern region of India has struggled due in large part to inadequate transportation links. As a result of the BBIN arrangements, the northeastern states will no longer have to travel roughly a thousand kilometers to reach the Kolkata port, and they will also be able to reach the Chittagong port in Bangladesh. The northeast of India could see a surge in commercial opportunities as a result of this (Pal 2016).

The agreement on BBIN MVA can be significant for promoting *energy exchanges* in the BBIN sub-region. The power generating countries like Bhutan will benefit to expand their market for power. The location of India is such that it shares common borders with all the BBIN neighboring countries hence India can lead to form a regional association of the BBIN nations and attract the regional and sub regional investments (Lama 2016).

4.3.2 Challenges faced by BBIN MVA Agreement

Given India's status as a leading SAARC member and the fact that neither Pakistan nor Sri Lanka are signatories to the BBIN agreement, New Delhi must take on a leadership role in the subregional organization (Pal 2016). India's strategic location and financial resources give it an edge in the BBIN sub region, but the success of the BBIN MVA's implementation depends largely on the contributions of the associated countries to the BBIN region's infrastructure development (CUTS 2017).

Bhutan, the smallest of the BBIN countries, is also opposed to the BBIN MVA agreement because, in their view, the vast entry as well as vehicular movement from the other nations would destroy the ambience of their country. Bhutan places a high value on the idea of the national gross happiness, which is linked to its ideas of a sustainable future and less political and social economic uncertainty (Ghosh 2017). Since economic growth is less important to Bhutan than maintaining its high ranking on the gross happiness index, the country's leaders have expressed some skepticism and concern about the free movement of people and goods well within sub-region (Pal 2016)

The lack of reliable connections between the countries in the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN) region is a critical problem. Poor management and high costs of transactions have long been associated with the common borders between Bangladesh and India that divide the BBIN region (Lakshmanan, 2001). Traffic congestion and road conditions jams at border crossings have been brought on by the BBIN sub region's pathetic road and rail network, as well as its pitiful number of operational rail and roadway cross-border corridors, and its poor functioning border procedures (i.e., enforcement of customs and other allied regulations) and inadequate institutional remedies to create an enabling environment for trade and services (Banerjee 2009).

There are a lot of political issues between the countries that make up the BBIN as well. For a number of years, India's demand that its transportation needs be met via Bangladesh has served as a political contentious issue. The political events such as the standoff between Nepal and India, Nepal alleged India of a business blockage, has resulted in an unfriendly relation among the nations of the 'BBIN MVA'. These contentious issues have not been resolved to everyone's satisfaction as of yet, and they could occasionally result in disruptions (Pal 2016).

As was previously mentioned, it is also essential to have a solid understanding of the political goals and key policies of the BBIN countries, as these may not always be in perfect alignment with one another. The manner in which all of the above problems have been handled within the guideline will determine whether or not 'BBIN MVA' is successful over the long term. The 'BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement' can also be viewed as a step toward a process of wider integration and as an access point to Southeast and East Asian nations. In the Mekong Ganga Cooperation and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic cooperation, India has also been negotiating agreements with Myanmar and Thailand. These negotiations have been taking place in the context of multi-sectoral technical and economic cooperation. The successful execution of such pacts will ensure a deeper level of integration between the BBIN sub-region and the rapidly expanding market in ASEAN. Given that India already has agreed to sign a number of free trade agreements (FTAs) with ASEAN countries, this has pivotal economically and strategically significance for India.

Additionally, the BBIN MVA project may well be utilized as a diplomatic instrument. It is common knowledge that China is making significant financial investments in the construction of new highways and rail lines in order to recreate the fabled Silk Road. The ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) initiative being undertaken by China is intended to link the regions of Europe and Africa to those of Asia. Through the Belt and Road initiative, a connection will be made between both the advanced European economic sphere and the East Asian economic sphere. In its broadest sense, the Belt and Road Initiative would encompass 65 nations, 4.4 billion people in the world, and approximately 40 percent of the world's GDP (World Bank, 2015). In light of China's expansive plan for the region, the BBIN MVA action plan will give India a solid foundation on which to build a prosperous and strategically significant presence in the area (Sharma and Rathore 2015:29).

In conclusion, in order for an endeavor such as BBIN MVA to be successful, it is essential to control the pace at which it pursues its goals and the scope of those goals. It is important to keep in mind that the countries that make up the BBIN group have varying degrees of economic development and size; as a result, the policies and goals of these nations might not be the same and there is a possibility that they won't be. In addition, the concern of domestic security all along border areas continues to be a major cause for concern for both the internal and external security of the country, and so these concerns have been progressively become an area of significant problem, which has the potential to halt the integration of the region as well as the sub-region. BBIN's viability and success in the long run will be contingent on the degree to which the countries that are affiliated with it are able to successfully meet these challenges (Pal 2016)

4.4 South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ)

“The development of the corridor for the BBIN sub region has been engrained with the formation of South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAQG), an organization that has been collectively designed by the four South Asian countries in the year 1996 with an inspiration taken from other regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) and

Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) that have ensured political and economic integration and cooperation among the states within the geopolitical boundaries” (Barthakur 2016). The primary objectives of the South Asian Growth Quadrangle (SAGQ) were to significantly raise trade and tourism between the four countries and also to enhance sub-regional connectivity (Shukla 2019). According to Murayama (2006), SAGQ has placed an emphasis on cooperation that is rooted in regional projects. She also argues that it has been viewed as a reasonable solution to the economic growth of the part of the region so far as it does not involve significant policy transitions through the participating countries. The inclusion of sub-regional cooperation within the SAARC framework work.

It has been argued by Sobhan (1999:146) that the incorporation of regional collaboration into the SAARC agreement has changed the emphasis of a comprehensive and integrated initiative of participation well within SAGQ to a collaborative effort of establishing particular project which has addressed among the geographically contiguous states. When SAGQ was first established, the Asian Development Bank became one of the first organizations to respond with a policy promoting sub-regional cooperation. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) initiated a project called “South Asia Sub-Regional Economic Cooperation” (SASEC) well with intention of resolving the misunderstandings between member states that have cast a pall over their otherwise warm and productive economic ties. According to the ADB, SAGQ is no longer active and has been absorbed by SASEC. A question mark remains over whether or not a lack of interest on the part of member states necessitated a shift in initiative focus from SAQG to SASEC. The importance and effort put into this specific sub-regional framework may change after the change in ownership (Maruyama 2006).

Sri Lanka, Maldives and Pakistan, had not been supportive SAGQ's initiative. These nations objected strongly and unilaterally before finally giving in. In 1997, SAARC secretaries agreed on a set of goals for the SAGQ's future growth and development, focusing on cross- border transportation and communications, investment and trade tourism, resource utilization and protection of the environment. The initiative failed to effectively launch because of initial setbacks and eventually fell prey to political

machinations of both the two member countries (Bangladesh and Nepal). Since then, however, the concept of collaboration and integration has gained traction (Shukla 2019). When compared to the countries of ASEAN, the intraregional trade that takes place within the South Asian region has historically been very weak. In 2015, the trade that took place between the countries of South Asia only accounted for five percent of all of those countries' total trade, in comparison to the trade that took place between the countries of ASEAN, which accounted for approximately twenty-five five per cent within the same time period. Poor intraregional investment, a lack of adequate connectivity, and complex political barriers have all contributed to South Asia's low level of regional integration, which has been displayed by these factors.

Hence for a smooth access to regional and international markets a higher level of integration is required among smaller and land locked countries such as Bhutan and Nepal with India keeping the North Eastern region as a major player due to its strategic location and availability of natural recourses that holds a great potential to bring in infrastructural development and development of trade (Barthakur 2016).

4.5 “Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar- Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC)”

For every Economic corridor to have a vision of potential economic growth depends upon an increased trade between the countries involved in the corridor region. This can be achieved by connecting centers of nodes that acts as generators of economic activities among the countries. The corridor does not directly contribute to economic vitality in the region; rather, it amplifies the potential already present with in geographical area for the expansion of economic activity. The corridor acts as the region's economic backbone by enhancing cooperation and connectivity and bringing about an advancement in the economic development of the country. In other words, the corridor is essential to the region's economy (Iyer 2017). Originally called the Kunming initiative, the BCIM-EC for regional cooperation was established in 1999 with the aim of fostering commercial and industrial growth in the region spanning from Kolkata to Kunming, with

a detour through the northeastern regions of India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh (Uberoi 2014).

Islam, Hossan and Martin (2015) argues that the BCIM-EC is a contemporary adaptation of Silk route and a revision of Kunming initiative of 1999 among the BCIM nations. Iyer (2017) strongly believes that the BCIM forum encompasses cooperation between the two Asian giants (*India and China*). By fostering multi-modal connectivity and strengthening people-to-people ties, this sub-regional forum hopes to create a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asian countries (Bhattacharjee 2014). Hussain (2015) argues that the success of regionalism as a transformative factor in international affairs is a driving force behind the advocacy of BCIM-EC. Positive outcomes for all participating countries are the result of regional integration. The potential for effective Asian regionalism rests largely with India and China, the two largest countries in the region and two of the world's fastest-growing economies. Bordering two of the world's least developed countries—Bangladesh, at 1880 kilometers and Myanmar, at 1331 kilometers—the northeastern region of India is actually larger than the rest of the country. Its northern and eastern borders with China total 2192 kilometers, while its western border with Bangladesh is 2699 kilometers in length. India borders Bangladesh on three sides, and they share a narrow strip of land in the southeast with Myanmar. Because of their close proximity, these countries have the opportunity to create a connectivity through regional cooperation, which would be greatly aided by the existing relationships between the people of these countries.

The BCIM-EC is predicated on the assumption that the intergovernmental connectivity between Kunming and Kolkata will be activated, thereby connecting the underdeveloped areas of Southwest China with those of Eastern India and the neighboring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar. Track 1 of the project, which aims to facilitate commerce and communication between Kunming and Kolkata, has been established so far (Karim and Islam 2018).

Map 4. 2 Map of BCIM EC



Source: IPCS Special Report, BCIM Economic Corridor: Facilitating Sub Regional Development, 2017

4.5.1 Trade Route of BCIM- EC

The BCIM-EC trade network is approximately 2,800 kilometres long and connects Kolkata in India to Kunming in China. It travels via Myanmar and Bangladesh along the way. The road goes from Kolkata, which is located in India, to Benapole, which is situated on the border between India and Bangladesh. From there, it continues on to Dhaka and Sylhet, both in Bangladesh, before reentering India near Silchar. Following that, the road joins Myanmar at Moreh, which is situated on the border between India and Myanmar. After entering China, the route travels through Ruili, Longling, and Dali before finally arriving in Kunming, all of which are located in the Yunnan Province. The route begins in Myanmar and travels along the Tamu-Kalewa Highway, passing through Mandalay and Lashio on its way (Iyer 2017)

4.5.2 Opportunities of BCIM-EC

“The BCIM-EC has a lofty goal of creating a new overland and maritime silk road that will connect the provinces of Southwest China to the India’s North Eastern states and the Bay of Bengal by way of northern Myanmar. This ambitious plan is part of the BCIM-grand EC's vision for a new silk road” (Uberoi 2016). The primary focus of the BCIM-EC forum has shifted from the 3Ts (trade, transport, and tourism) to TTE (trade, transport, and energy) over the course of the past few years (Yhome 2017). Because hydroelectric resources are plentiful in both Yunnan and India's North, the BCIM-EC can

work together to collaborate in the power sector. It would be to the advantageous of India as well as Bangladesh if they could work together to cooperate in the hydel resources. The BCIM-EC may also prove useful for agricultural industries that work together to improve their own factors of production and build modern agricultural industries. There is a good chance that the private enterprises of the member countries will benefit, and this will provide South Asia in general with an advantage to realize developmental and economic gains (Islam et al. 2015)

4.5.3 Energy Connectivity

Energy has developed to become a common thread for connecting areas of sustainable development for various countries and subregions in India. Energy sector development would prove to be a major means of integrating the NER with the economic centers in neighboring South and Southeast Asian countries. It is in Bangladesh's, India's, and Myanmar's best interest to source electricity from Nepal and Bhutan because doing so will lead to cheaper customs duties and more continuous delivery. The NER has the potential to contribute in three different ways to the energy security of the subregion (Anbumozhi et al.). Through the establishment of connections in the areas of energy, transportation, and communications, the BCIM-EC will grow into a thriving economic belt, which will ultimately result in the cumulative growth of the area (Lama 2020).

In addition, Anbumozhi et al. (2019) are of the opinion that perhaps the North Eastern region in India has been very important for the connectivity of energy resources with the countries that are nearby. NER is home to several states that are extremely abundant in petroleum resources, including Assam and Tripura. The potential for hydropower generation in Arunachal Pradesh is significant. Both coal and uranium are found in Meghalaya, while Mizoram is known for its abundant biomass. Other states in the North Eastern region, including Sikkim, also have hydro-potential. There is a significant amount of solar potential in the regions of Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. To tap these opportunities from the region India's energy connectivity, particularly that of the NER with ASEAN, has been one of the foundations of the Act East Policy. This has further led to an accelerated increase the engagement between India and ASEAN. The cooperation will further lead to economic stability in the region with

further growth and integration in the region. From this perspective, the NER is in a good position to meet the common requirements of economic growth through energy connectivity (Anbumozhi et al. 2019).

India's Act East Policy is at stake in these negotiations over trade and labour mobility with ASEAN and beyond, and this initiative could be a game-changer. Given the critical importance of this economic corridor to South Asia's growth, it is essential that different regional connectivity initiatives be brought into harmony with one another. After a long period of stagnation and uncertainty, the BCIM-EC has made significant progress. Many South Asian observers, however, see this route as a promising new opportunity that could dramatically alter the course of history in their region (Yhome 2017). Whenever the BCIM-EC is put into action, the regional economy as a whole benefit. Factors like proximity, shared linguistics, and the “Regional Trade Agreement” will have a positive effect on trade flows among BCIM countries, making their development into an economic community (EC) a priority.

Priorities for the BCIM-EC should include regional integration (via transportation, telecommunication, power and energy, investment and trade environmental sustainability, and people-to-people exchange), among other things. The corridor is planned to improve trade between India and China, while also bolstering the developing economies of both Myanmar and Bangladesh. floating exchange arrangements would be encouraged by the BCIM-EC, which would also strengthen multilateral and bilateral financial cooperation, establish financial arms for regional development, and boost the region's economic competitiveness. Bangladesh needs to get ready for the corridor, which will help with both exports and imports, in order to reap the benefits of the BCIM road connectivity. Given the size of the Chinese and Indian markets, the value of both traditional and nontraditional exports to these countries is likely to be quite good. Bangladeshi goods have an advantage in the Chinese and Indian markets due to the country's low labour costs. The importance of prioritizing the standardization of export product diversification cannot be overstated. The prosperity which East Asia has experienced in recent decades has not even come close to being replicated in South Asia. BCIM has the potential to become the new portal through which

economic growth in this region can be viewed. We can only hope that one day we will live in a world where it is possible to have three different meals at Kunming, Dhaka, and in Kolkata (Islam et al. 2015).

4.5.4 Issues faced by BCIM-EC

There have been major issues and challenges faced by the BCIM-EC initiative. Firstly, Yhome (2017) argues that one of the major issues regarding the BCIM-EC, is the contradicting argument on the approach itself. One group argues for an economic centric approach and the second group argues for an inclusive approach, which is more people centric so as to be more mindful of local social realities. Another issue stated by Yhome is that the people living in the border regions are more concerned about the societal, economic and environmental impacts. Whereas, the government is concerned with the political and security issues and geo-political implications of this project.

“The BCIM-EC route passes through Manipur (India) and Shan State (Myanmar), these two states are highly instable with low levels of development. The region is interwoven with insurgency. The two states serve as a crossroads for small and mid-sized drug operations. The region of Shan, which includes the so-called Golden Triangle, is a major player in the global poppy trade. Human trafficking, drug smuggling, and the illicit trade of gold, alcohol, weapons, jade, and timber are all intertwined with one another. Cross-cultural ties in the region allow insurgent groups in the NER and Myanmar to work together. Any attempt at economic growth in these areas is constantly threatened by local militias. These insurgencies call for a comprehensive strategy to manage them, stop them from happening, and end them” (Iyer 2017).

4.5.6 Failure of BCIM-EC

Lama (2020) opines that the BCIM-EC has been another failed platform of India and China. Despite two decades of discourses and debates the BCIM-EC forum meetings (1999-2015) remains far from being formalized. Although the initiative has a huge potential, it is still being surrounded by uncanny skepticism and ambiguous stands taken by the member states. India has taken an ambiguous stand in this forum owing to the

manifold impact that BCIM-EC might entail for India such as lack of confidence due to China's expansionist policies in the recent times. In addition to this it might also affect India's internal security as the proposed route includes India's north eastern region which in itself is an insurgency prone area.

Despite the apparent benefits, the BCIM Forum has not been immune to political and strategic uncertainty. The BCIM Initiative has been criticized by some in India who believe it is China's "String of Pearls" strategy to gain dominance in the region. An increasing Chinese presence in South Asia may be motivated by a desire to improve economic and political stability by controlling key sea lanes. As ties strengthen, it becomes more likely that Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar will view BCIM economic integration as a guarantee of future stability and prosperity. This will pave the way for a win-win expansion of the initiative. Improved commerce and commerce between India and China will benefit both countries, ushering into a new power order, and protecting the security and peace of the region (Hussain 2015).

However there has been a strong sense of the lack of resources to compete with other networks, India has been taking up this project slowly as first and foremost India need to strengthen its own internal linkages with the north-eastern states and move further with the neighboring countries.

4.6 Asian Highway

The arrival of the Asian Highway has given the roads in the Siliguri corridor a global logistical boost. National Highway 31 begins in Barhi, Jharkhand, and ends in Guwahati, Assam. The National Highway 31A joins Sikkim to Sevoke, and the National Highway 31C links Galgalia, West Bengal, to Bijni, Assam, and both of these highways are located near Siliguri between Naxalbari and Bagdogra. With no other significant supply link from India, Sikkim relies heavily on the National Highway 31 (NH31). Siliguri is linked to the state capital of Kolkata and beyond that, all of India, including Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, via National Highway 31, which connects to National Highway 34 at Dalkhola in the Uttar Dinajpur district and begins at Dum Dum in Kolkata. With the launch of the Asian Highway, a massive infrastructure project with

regional implications, India will have a vital lifeline for its Act East policy, which aims to improve major road infrastructures in Asia (Ghosh 2018:139)

The “Asian Highway” network is a major transportation participation venture that aims to enhance and develop the transport links in Asia to promote the creation of Euro-Asia transport connections and strengthen the accessibility of bordering countries. The initiative is a part of the “*Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*”, which is part of the “*Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)*”. The promotion of both bilateral and international trade as well as tourism as a means of fostering regional cooperation and ties is the primary objective. This Asian Highway has a total length of approximately 141,000 kilometres and is comprised of roads that travel through a total of 32 member countries. The year 1959 marked the beginning of this endeavor, which was started with the intention of fostering and establishing a global transportation system throughout the region (UNESCAP 2006).

The Asian Highway Network agreement, which lays out a plan for the development of international highways in Asia in a way that is both coordinated and comprehensive, did not take effect until 2005 (Madhur et al. 2009). “The Asian Highway cooperative project among the countries of Asia and Europe and the United Nation Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific to develop the highway systems in Asia could be another landmark for the corridor once it is completed connecting Panitanki near Siliguri on the Indo-Nepal border with Phulbari on the same district on the Indo-Bangladesh Border will connect to Chandrabanga (Indo-Bangladesh border) which in the Cooch Bihar district and finally to Jaigoan on the Indo-Bhutan border” (Ghosh 2018:139).

The Asian Highway, which is currently being built in full swing will connect Bhutan (Phuentsholling) to the India-Bangladesh border point at Changrabandha in Cooch Behar and West Bengal through Dooars. This highway would act as a major boost for further such road network being built in the Northeast, connecting all of the major social, cultural, economic, and political points in the region together. The planned route for the Asian Highway begins at the road that connects Imphal in India and Tamu in Myanmar. From there, it would continue to the Kalemryo railway and then continue on to

Mandalay in Myanmar. The goal is to build a four-lane highway connecting New Delhi and Singapore, with connections to Ho Chi Minh City, Kuala Lumpur, Phnom Pen, Bangkok, Vientiane, Yangon, Mandalay, Kalembo, Tamu, Dhaka, and Kolkata. This highway would also go through Kuala Lumpur (UNESCAP 2006).

The plan of the program was aimed to speed up the process of economic unification in Asia by increasing the demand for international transportation, and as a result, the Asian Highway plan was anticipated to have a significant impact on the economy of the East Asian region (Lee and Seo 2011). The actual physical condition of Asia's various highway networks varies greatly from one region or subregion of the continent to another. The road system is a patchwork, consisting of a variety of different types of roads that range from motorways or access-controlled roads, including dual lane road motorways, to only one divided highway two-lane roads, and in some exceptional cases, to single lane roads. However, there is still the challenge of locating and allotting sufficient financial resources, as well as appropriately constructing the road and maintaining the technology. The contributing member nations have significant assurance that the development of the highway will be completed towards the level of professionalism as well as benchmarks that have been originally intended. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) of the United Nations classified the Asian Highway routes into four types in 2006: a) primary, that consists of five or more lanes and is access-controlled; b) Class I (four lanes or more) c) Class II (two lanes) d) Class III (three lanes or less) (two lanes).

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka are the countries that make up the South Asian subregion of the Asian Highway. In South Asian region the overall distance of the Asian Highway is about 20,783 kilometres, to which India has a greater length because of its larger region. The following are the significant route of the Asian Highway in South Asia that connects with the various nations of the subregion.

AH1 – New Delhi – Lahore – Islamabad – Peshawar – Kabul.

AH1 – New Delhi – Lahore – Rohri – Quetta – Taftan – Zahedan.

AH1 – Dhaka – Jessore – Benapol – Kolkata.

AH1 – Tamu – Imphal – Dimapur – Shillong.

AH41/AH2/AH42 – Mongla – Hatikamul – Banglabandh – Kakarbhitta – Narayangarh – Kathmandu.

AH4 – Karachi – Lahore – Hassanabdal – Khunjarab – Kashi.

AH48 – India (Siliguri) – Phentsholing – Thimpu.

AH1/AH42 – Kolkata – Barhi – Raxual – Birgunj – Kathmandu – Kodari – Lhasa.

AH48 – India (Siliguri) – Phentsholing – Thimpu.⁹

AH1/AH42 – Kolkata – Barhi – Raxual – Birgunj – Kathmandu – Kodari – Lhasa.

AH43 – Matara – Colombo – Dhaumbala – Madurai – Bangalore – Agra – New Delhi.

⁹ The Asian Highway in Bhutan has been extended to Thimphu. India has indicated no objection to designating Siliguri – Hashimara – Jaigaon in India as Asian Highway route linking to Bhutan which will be considered by the next session of the Working Group on the Asian Highway.

Map 4. 3 Map of Asian Highway Route



Source: https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/AH%20map_1Nov2016.

The majority of the “Asian Highway” in the part of the South Asian region is composed of type III benchmark that is associated with two-way highways and roadways, while 12 percent are below the type III benchmark. According to a recent survey, nearly about 10 percent of the total network in the South Asian region have been upgraded to Class I benchmark.

Within the context of the agreement Reached on the Asian Highway, "focusing on improving and upgrading the network of roads to appease the least design standards" can mean "considering focusing on the upgrading and improving the highway network." A review conducted in 2005 to analyze the financial goals and requirements for the development of the Highway estimated that roughly 25 billion United States dollars had indeed been perpetrated or was being decided to invest to establish the Asian Highway network in the participating countries. Since the Intergovernmental Agreement entered into force in 2005, significant advancements have been made in the process of expanding and enhancing the Highway network. Approximately 10,000 kilometres of the roads in

countries involved were updated to accomplish the desired goal of the class standards (UNESCAP 2006).

Through the use of the media and the internet, as well as by enabling meetings and debates between the member states, it was ascertained that the venture to build the Asian Highway would be one of the strategic initiatives. The secretariat is continuing to collaborate the financing organizations and institutions in an effort to encourage investment in the projects that have been prioritized as being important for the Asian Highway (UNESCAP 2006).

4.7 Act East Policy

Connectivity is imperative for Act East Policy to progress. This has made a massive progression with the Asian Highway 1 that connects India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar and Asian Highway 2 that connects India, with Nepal and Bangladesh through the north-east region. The “Act East Policy” of India is a diplomatic initiative that seeks to strengthen the country’s ties to the vast Asia-Pacific region on economic, strategic, and cultural levels (Kesevan 2020).

The “Act East Policy” is the continuation of the Look East policy that was initiated by the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in the year 1991. According to Haokip (2011), India launched the Look East Policy in an effort to maintain its regional power and counter China's strategic influence in the region through the cultivation of extensive economic and geopolitical relations with the nations of Southeast Asia. Therefore, these two policies are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are the two sides of the same coin that represent two distinct but concurrent phases in the development of India's foreign policy toward the Emerging economies (Kesevan 2020).

The Act East Policy has successfully evolved over the past few years that initially started as the Look East Policy. The above discussed projects on connectivity and roadways have helped to boost the Indian governments ‘Act East Policy’ and also strengthen cooperative and regional ties with the neighboring states. Hence India being the main stake holder of the Siliguri corridor has a great opportunity to fully and wisely utilize the corridor for connecting to the northeastern states and also to be the backbone

of the Act East Policy. This policy of development emphasizes on the neighborhood first policy which is the main primary goal of the “Act East Policy”. This has further helped in promoting economic and cultural ties as well as build up ties at the regional, bilateral and the multilateral level (Brahma 2018).

Kalita (2018) “has argued that the Act East policy of India has been able to change the game of world trade and industry supremacy from the developed to the developing countries as it can be seen by the developing and changing political trends in the Asian region”. India's Act East policy will help increase momentum with bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) like the “Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership” (RCEP) and the “Asia - Pacific economic cooperation (APEC)”, which will benefit India and help advance the country's economy and deepen the economic ties between India and the other members of ASEAN (Bhattacharjee 2016).

Mir (2017) illustrates that how plan has noticeably managed to make a shift in India's observation of the world. This shift has resulted in India acknowledging and emphasizing the importance of South - eastern Asia's trade and industry to India's overall concern for the nation as a whole. Since the 1990s, Rajiv Sikri believes that economic and domestic concerns have led India to focus more of its attention on the countries that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). India's foreign policy now includes a greater emphasis on strengthening ties with Southeast Asian nations. Through the Eurasian Economic Union, the Asia-Europe Meeting, and ASEAN, as well as through regional organizations like BIMSTEC and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, India is working to build relations with these countries. The economy is the primary driving force here. The dispute over Tibetan territory and Chinese aid to India's neighbors, especially Pakistan and Nepal, have kept relations between the two countries on edge. To enable Asia to contribute to a primary international position and responsibility, Asia's leading player must first achieve victory over domestic issues and consciously advance a joint model for Asia's safety measures and collaboration.

Brahma (2018) argues that “India’s Act East Policy is based on the 3 C’s, that is, Culture, Connectivity and Commerce to expand and increase better relations with

ASEAN nations. These 3Cs are Commerce, Connectivity and Culture. This focus on 3Cs has a prospect to further encourage economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia Pacific region through bilateral engagement, regional and multilateral levels that will bring about connectivity in the north eastern states of India”.

Therefore, the growth of India’s North Eastern states is a policy priority because of the region's strategic importance as the gateway to the East and as an extended corridor for India's progress and prosperity. As an added bonus, the Act East Policy helps strengthen commerce and economic ties with South East Asian countries (Brahma 2018). By centering and adapting the approach on geographical proximity and sub regional cooperation, the policy further emphasizes reform and liberalization on trade, economic growth and development, of India's north eastern states. Although there is no doubt that this policy has managed to bring India relatively close to the Asean member countries, India has not been capable of fully benefit from the advantages that have arisen as a result of these closer ties (Bhattacharjee 2016).

4.7.1 Challenges in Act East Policy

In spite of the fact that it has a lot of untapped potential, this policy continues to run into challenges as a result because it is dependent on the nation’s domestic initiatives. It's indeed conceivable to observe that the condition of the current projects has indeed been postponed as a consequence of issues associated with establishing publicly funded collaborative relationships and investment. This is a barrier to the acceleration of infrastructure connectivity projects. These obstacles have been managed to bring due to the reality that the Act East Policy was created. Scott (1998:93) argues that in order to connect with the South East Asian nations through the North Eastern states, firstly it has to break the gap of history and rich diversified culture and traditions from the mainland India with the North Eastern states.

"Corruption has been another obstacle that has caused a setback in India's Act East policy as such centrally funded initiatives flowing in the North Eastern states involve huge sums of money that have yet to be executed at the grass root level and as a result, the majority of the projects related to the policy are delayed." (Rabha 2019). Patil

(2016) argues that India should have a holistic strategic vision of the Asia Pacific rather than confining itself to limited views. India should go for a larger picture with a great geographic scope. However, the security factor has left a little bit of a doubt about the seriousness in working hard in its aspiration to become a major regional actor. The Act East Policy's vision of India's connectivity development can only be achieved if these projects operate rapidly and can only gain momentum when the region starts to develop at a consistent rhythm in a neutral way. The only way this vision can be achieved is if these projects function quickly.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Geopolitics has demonstrated an understanding of the international issues that links power, concerns, strategic interests and the local environment of the region. The use of geopolitics has demonstrated the dependence on natural resources and the dominance of strategic interests in the area between different nations and their combined interests. The struggle of geopolitical power in the region for regional competition has been widely represented in the international context. The past research works have analyzed and focused on the geopolitical relevance of India's Siliguri-Dooars corridor at the national and international level in terms of transportation connectivity, economic activities, cultural connectivity, and security issues after a brief introduction to the concepts of geopolitics and corridor.

The 60 km long and 22km wide stretch Siliguri-Dooars corridor, commonly referred to as the "Chicken neck corridor" because of its form is a narrow stretch of land in West Bengal. The corridor is an access to the Northeastern states of India from the Indian subcontinent. It is also strategically placed at a crossroads, bordering three of India's most critical neighboring countries: Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Chumbi Hills in the eastern Himalayas.

The geographical location of the corridor is such that it has made the region strategically crucial and vulnerable at the same time among the international players. The corridor being a major stakeholder for India has benefitted Nepal and Bhutan, two landlocked nations in terms of trade, communications and commercial deeds. The regions proximity to the Chumbi Valley in the north of Doklam, has increased the corridor's geo strategic worth by allowing it to watch China's expanding progress of road near the border areas, especially the Chumbi Valley.

Chumbi valley has been historically vital to India, Tibet and Bhutan's economies. The strategic passes of Sikkim's Nathu La and Jelep La, as well as Bhutan's pivot points and Tibet's Chumbi valley, have long served as a buffer zone for power struggles

between India and China. These passes serve as strategic mountain choke points that makes Siliguri corridor extremely important as the only accessible route to Tibet. As a result, the corridor's regional geopolitical future asserts that it will significantly contribute to the development of the entire region (Rahmati et al. 2020:5).

The hypothesis of the research rationalizes that the Siliguri-Dooars Corridor is always susceptible and unstable due to the influence and interplay of a diverse set of variables. If the corridor is incorporated into larger sub regional cooperation dynamics such as BBIN MVA and Act East Policy, it has the potential to revolutionize the region's development and connectivity dynamics.

The study has been divided into five chapters. The first chapter has given a brief outline of the theoretical understanding of the corridor and has outlined the major objectives of the study along with the current research questions with the account of the existing literature in the field of the study. It has been observed that corridors in broad sense have become one of the crucial components to help support commercial and cultural activity in any region. This is because corridors allow people to move freely from one place to another. They have been very persistent historically and have built the largest urban system in the world. They help to increase the connectivity, competitiveness of national and regional production networks. The second chapter discusses the birth of the corridor and its evolution in becoming a vibrant region in terms of its geopolitical relevance. The genesis of the corridor has been traced back to the era of British decolonization process. The evolution of Siliguri as a small town came into prominence after the Indian independence from the colonial rule. The drawing of the Radcliff line led to the partition of India and Pakistan. After that, the corridor became more prominent as a result of the decolonization movement's impact on the landscape.

There has been a complex and complicated timeline of historical events that led to the creation of the Siliguri-Dooars corridor. The partition of India in the year 1947 was one of the major events that gave birth to the corridor which was followed by the liberation of Bangladesh 1971 (Panda 2013:1). The liberation of Bangladesh in the year 1971 has been a landmark event as the creation of Bangladesh brought about new geopolitics to the corridor. The porous border that India shared with Bangladesh brought

about major changes in the demography of the region with continuous unchecked influx of the migrants.

The corridor region also became sensitive due to the cross- border terrorism through Bangladesh. The Jamaat-ul-Mujahidin- Bangladesh (JMB), an Islamic terrorist group that has been active in the region, emerged as one of the severe threats to the corridor. This terrorist cell had a lot of networks in India, mainly in West Bengal. The National investigation Agency asserts that majority of the terrorist group's recruits are apparently from West Bengal and Assam, claiming that the preparation for insurgency transpired in Burdwan and Murshidabad. This has brought about major security concerns to the corridor region and the radical Islamic organizations in Bangladesh has been focusing on expanding their influence across the border by utilizing West Bengal as their launching pad and breeding ground for their activities (Bhattacharjee 2015).

The India-China war of 1962 marks an important event in terms of the long border conflict between the two Asian giants. The 1962 Indo-China War highlighted the crucial boundary issues between the two countries. China's greater interest over the western sector towards the Ladakh region that connects Tibet to Sinkiang has amplified the border tensions between India and China. According to Lama (2016), the concern of the physical boundary between the two countries is one of the primary contributing factors in the conflict and national dialogue that exists between the two nations. This has further influenced the country's decisions regarding its foreign policy as well as its acquisitions, both of which are based on the nation's interests.

Following the India-China war of 1962, there have been a protracted period of disagreement along the frontiers of India and China. Sikkim's strategic importance in the context of the India-China border in terms of security was highlighted by the Nathu La and Cho La skirmishes, also known as the Sino-Indian war of 1967, along the Himalayan kingdom's borders. As Sikkim had maintained close cultural and economic ties with Tibet. The passes of Nathu La and Chola had aided these connections. In addition, the aforementioned passes served as major trade routes.

The merger of Sikkim in the year 1975 as the 22nd state of India was another major event that reinforced India's connection to the Siliguri-Dooars corridor. Sikkim is considered as a strategically important location, which is on the front line of India's disputed border with China. Furthermore, a short triangular extension known as the Chumbi Valley of the Tibet Autonomous Region, which stretches between Sikkim and Bhutan, has historically been Tibet's only route of connection. Kalimpong and the Siliguri-Dooars Corridor have access to Sikkim's southern region. As a result, this narrow swath of corridor is vital to India's security because it connects the Indian mainland to the entire North Eastern region

There were several skirmishes and territorial disputes along the Indochinese border. However, the Doklam standoff that took place in 2017 led to major bilateral tests between India and China. China's action in the Chumbi Valley and Doklam areas has brought the issue of Siliguri-Dooars corridor security issues to the fore. China's continued perennial activity in the border area has endangered the corridor region. Like any confrontation or collision makes the corridor region vulnerable and the main target. As a result, the corridor running through it becomes a crucial piece of land connecting the Indian continent to its northeastern states. However, the situation today is not the same as it was previously; things have changed, but China, as one of Asia's most powerful countries, continues to pose a significant danger. Indian strategists are concerned about China's expanding influence in developing infrastructure near border areas, such as Chumbi Valley, which is located at junction three.

The corridor is only 500 kilometers away from India (Sikkim), Bhutan, and China (Tibet). The main concern is that if China gains control of the Chumbi Valley region in the near future, it would be able to quickly deploy Special Forces to block the Chicken Neck Corridor, essentially isolating Bhutan and North Bengal. Bhutan is a very strategically significant country for India, that operates as a buffer state, and China's expanding diplomacy with Bhutan provides us various grounds to consider this prospect seriously. Because of the geopolitical relevance of the Doklam dispute between China and Bhutan, it was important for India to take a key role in the conflict.

Both sides of the disputed border regions have been heavily guarded and commanded by armed personnel, reflecting strategic, social, political and economic infrastructure, as well as restricted cross-border interactions. It is essential that India and China work together to achieve peace and harmony within itself and throughout the South Asian region. The Siliguri-Dooars has also evolved to be one of the most vibrant regions in the Eastern Himalayas. The corridor has facilitated the land locked countries such as Nepal and Bhutan in terms of pathways and connectivity for tourism, trade and transportation. The corridor region has developed into an economic center, serving not only the local populace but also that of its neighboring countries. As a significant participant in a strategically significant corridor region, India has a huge opportunity to grow and deepen its ties with these nearby nations who rely on the corridor extensively.

However, the corridor has been interwoven with major threats that has made the region vulnerable. Historically the Siliguri-Dooars corridor has been a sphere of conflict. The region has been associated with political instability and international border porosity. The Naxalite movement that began in the year 1967 originated from the villages of Naxalbari and Phansidewa that is located 23km away from the Siliguri Corridor. Consequently, the corridor has always been a sensitive region as it was the birthplace of Marxist revolutionaries. Several armed groups and rebel insurgents have called the region home, including the ULFA, NDFB, NSCN, Bodo Security Force, KPLT, Islamic jihadist group, MULTA, and KLO. As the corridor contains three international borders, it has been reported that Pakistan has been passing ISIS militants via the Indo-Bangladesh border. The corridor has also aided ISI agents' clandestine operations aiding the transit of commodities and people across borders.

The corridor region has also witnessed series of extensive agitation and violence like the Gorkhaland agitation of 1986 and 1988 for the demand of statehood. This has brought about political and economic instability in the region due to indefinite strikes and political turmoil. North-east insurgents across the corridor have been a major obstacle to the development of political welfare in the chicken neck tunnel. Through successful economic development initiatives and actions to create self-reliance in the corridor, the

political and economic instability of the north eastern area can be given chances and brought into a substantial nationwide improvement for India.

The Siliguri-Dooars corridor has also witnessed an increased rate of illegal activities across the border. The region has developed to be a center point for many illegal activities such as weapon, drugs and wildlife smuggling, cross-border human trafficking. This is primarily because of the uncontrolled and the porous border that we share with Bangladesh and an open border that we have with Nepal. Human trafficking has its sources most often in Nepal and Bangladesh, and the Siliguri corridor in India is a meeting spot from where the trafficking victims, including women and children, are moved and subjected to forced labor and commercial sex. The porous border has further facilitated an easy cross border movement of many illegal immigrants from Bangladesh which has posed a great threat to the national security of India mainly affecting the North eastern states. It has been a challenging mission to maintain the peace and security of the region, since 1971, millions of people have come from Bangladesh to the nearby states of West Bengal and Assam in search of better prospects and means of subsistence.

The most important insights that have emerged from the research study has been comprehensively discussed in the fourth chapter. Despite security concerns, the Siliguri-Dooars corridor has immense potential to provide India and the sub-region with significant future opportunities. The location and status of India in South Asia makes it strategically important for important communication with all the sub-regions of the region. India's central location in the region has played an important role in functioning as a bridge between the economies of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan sub region. This has led to the emergence of emerging relations with Southeast Asian countries, India's northeastern region has played a major role in this volatile political situation, which has resulted in strong relations between the two countries and opened up opportunities for creating sub-regional initiative in South Asia.

As discussed, in the fourth chapter sub regional initiatives such as the BBIN motor vehicle agreement has been a milestone game changer in the sub region that has promoted economic and socio-cultural activities where the four nations have come

together to strengthen their connectivity. This initiative is significant for several reasons, first and foremost, this would significantly increase trade with Bhutan, Nepal as well as the Northeast. The corridor might evolve with the completion of another significant project, such as the “Asian Highway” Project between “Asian and European nations and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific” to develop Asian highway systems. Regional initiatives in the sub region such as the BCIM EC and South Asian growth Quadrangle has also developed the cross-border connectivity in the sub region that has immensely boosted trade and tourism among the four nations. Apart from trade, tourism and transportation (Yhome 2017) argues that energy cooperation has also become an important sector for integrating NER with the neighboring South east Asian countries.

These regional connectivity initiatives and transportation initiatives have benefited the Indian government's 'Act East Policy,' as well as strengthening cooperative and regional ties with surrounding states. India, the main stakeholder in the Siliguri-Dooars corridor, has a special opportunity to fully and wisely utilize the corridor to connect to the north-eastern states and advance its ‘Act East policy’. This development strategy fosters economic cooperation, cultural links, and the development of strategic relationships with nations in the region through constant involvement at regional, bilateral, and multilateral levels in order to improve the interaction of North Eastern Indian states with other bordering countries. It focuses on the Asia-Pacific region's comprehensive neighborhood with the primary aim with respect to "Act East Policy."

Siliguri-Dooars corridor, however, has not been strategically developed. India needs to comprehend the corridor's regional importance and sociopolitical relevance. There should be prudent and effective use of the corridor. This will benefit the socioeconomic growth of the area, as well as alleviate instability and tensions in India's north-eastern region and spur development throughout the eastern Himalayan region. The Indian government should look beyond and pursue a sub-regional initiative of cooperation and integration with its neighbors, that will benefit India, its neighbors, and most crucially, the South Asian region as a whole.

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