

The Siliguri Corridor in Academic Discourse: Between Strategic Anxiety and Developmental Aspiration

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Received: 13.06.2026; Accepted: 12.08.2026; Published online: 31.08.2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54280/jse.260810>

Abstract: The Siliguri corridor, the single land bridge connecting mainland India with the Northeastern states, has long been portrayed as a territorial bottleneck and dubbed the “Chicken’s neck”. It has been described as a strategically vulnerable region, 20- 22 km wide at its narrow point and 60 km long. This partial representation has drawn attention to a single axis of analysis: military threat and geopolitical vulnerability. This article presents a thematic literature review on the Siliguri Corridor based on the articles, books, book chapters, policy documents, and reports published between 2000 and mid-2026. The study focuses on three themes: geopolitical vulnerability, connectivity and development, and borderlands, ethnicity, and sub-conventional security. The findings suggest that much of the scholarship focuses on the geopolitical vulnerability of this region. However, contemporary findings suggest that research is now moving toward multidimensional regional analysis. The study concludes by identifying research gaps, such as understanding the region as a spatial system, the scope of the region’s development, a community-level perspective, and comparative regional analysis. It suggests that integrated research, which brings together environmental, economic, geopolitical, and socio-economic spheres, will help to understand the complex issues of this region and support sustainable policy intervention.

Key words: Chicken’s neck, geopolitics, vulnerability, BBIN, BIMSTEC, BRI

1 Introduction

The Siliguri corridor has increasingly become a central stage for attracting scholars and policymakers because of its importance in shaping India’s connectivity, security, and regional development dynamics. The recent decision of the newly elected West Bengal Government to transfer 142.8 acres of land to the Border Security Force (BSF) for security-related infrastructural development and the approval for the transfer of several national highway stretches to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation

Limited (NHIDCL) reflect its strategic significance in terms of national security and planning (Bose, 2026; The Economic Times, 2026). The metaphor ‘chicken’s neck’ is applied to the Siliguri Corridor because of its shape, location, and areal width. Connecting the whole of the north-eastern states, this corridor is 60 km long and 20-22 km wide at its narrowest point (Malik, 2015; Farhan, 2021; Chakraborty, 2026) (fig. 1). East of this corridor, the whole Northeast lies within seven states and parts of an eighth, with abundant natural resources and boundaries with China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Hence, if the corridor is affected by political turmoil, military force,

or natural disaster, the whole northeast is disconnected from mainland India. The narrowness of this neck has influenced policymakers, scholars, and strategic thinkers. One of the landmarks in corridor literature is the Doklam standoff in 2017, in which, for 73 days, Indian and Chinese troops faced each other near the Bhutan border, which is less than 100 km from the Siliguri Corridor. Due to this standoff, analysts debated various issues related to the security of the corridor, including potential threats, existing infrastructural deficiencies, and the adequacy of Indian forces. Following this incident, the mushrooming of literature took place in the same direction, where contributing scholars were not only from strategic studies but also geography, environmental science, development economics, anthropology, and so on. This diversification enriches the scholarly platform as it enables us to understand the problem on multiple dimensions. Additionally, it calls for the responsibility to review and assess the expanding body of research and identify the future direction of research in this region.

The present study, under that context, attempts to undertake holistic research by critically reviewing the existing literature,

understanding the research gaps, and finding out the future directions for future research. The central question of this study is to re-examine the contemporary scholarship on the Siliguri corridor beyond the vulnerability paradigm. For that purpose, the study focuses on a narrative literature review based on articles published in peer-reviewed journals, chapters in edited volumes, think-tank reports, and government documents published between 2000 and mid-2026. The year 2000 was chosen as the baseline because it is when India's continuing post-liberalization involvement with its eastern periphery began, and when more rigorous academic interest in the corridor grew systemic and themed on connectivity and security, which allows ample time horizon to map how writings evolved before and after the 2017 standoff at Doklam. Sources were identified through systematic searches of Google Scholar, JSTOR, and institutional repositories using keywords including "Siliguri Corridor," "Chicken's Neck," "Northeast India security," and "BBIN connectivity." The review aimed at mapping the dominant themes, tracing the debates among the scholars, and identifying the gaps.

The article is divided into the following segments. The next segment focused on the background of the corridor, which implies the geographical and historical setup of the region. It discussed how the corridor got its present geopolitical status. The subsequent segments review the existing literature under three themes: geopolitical vulnerability, connectivity and borderland ethnicity, and sub-conventional security. Following that, the next segment attempted to synthesize the findings across and argue for a comprehensive analytical framework.

2 Background

The Siliguri corridor, the only land bridge between mainland India and North-East

India, occupies a peculiar geographical position. The corridor is approximately 60 km long and 22 km wide at its narrowest point. The proximity of the corridor to international borders makes this region unique. It shares international boundaries with Nepal in the west, separated by the Mechi River in various stretches; Bangladesh in the south and south-east, under strict surveillance to prevent infiltration; and Bhutan in the north, a buffer state between India and China. Although China does not share a direct boundary with the corridor, the Chumbi Valley, which is a China-controlled Tibetan Autonomous Region beyond the northern frontier of Bhutan, tapers near the corridor, making this region geopolitically significant. Physiographically, the

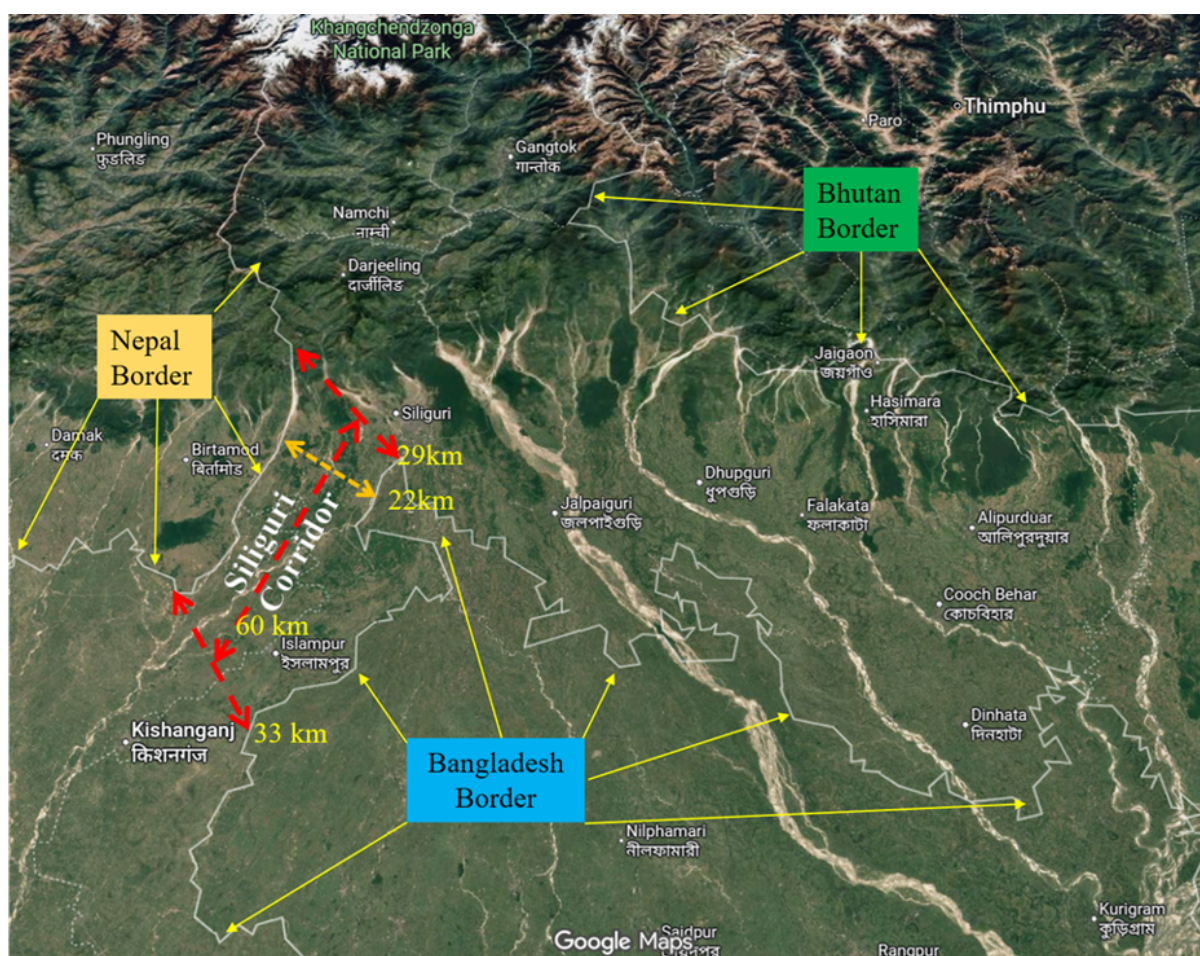


Figure 1: Siliguri Corridor Region.

region is characterized by diversified physiographic units: the Terai region, the Dooars region, and the Indo-Gangetic transition plain. The Teesta, Mahananda, and Jaldhaka are the major river systems in the region, which originate in the Himalayas and run southward across the region. The dense forests and wildlife reserves make this region ecologically significant. In terms of economy, this region has great potential in terms of trade, tourism, and logistics hub of North-east India due to its situational advantage. This landscape is an intersection of different dimensions; geopolitical, environmental and economic due to the transition between mountain and plain, fertile agricultural land, tea gardens, forests, logistical value and proximity to the international borders (Singh, 2026; Deb, 2022). The Siliguri Corridor is the outcome of a series of historical, geopolitical and territorial transformations in the eastern Himalayas and Bengal region during colonial and postcolonial times. The first major geopolitical change to take place in the eastern Himalayas was the Treaty of Sugauli between Nepal and the British East India Company (Table 1). In the Anglo-Nepal War, the British defeated Nepal and forced it to surrender large tracts of land, including parts of the Terai and adjoining present-day North Bengal (Ghishing, 2024; Singh, 2026). This enabled the British to consolidate their hold over the Himalayan foot-hills. The next important territorial change happened in 1835 when the British obtained Darjeeling from Sikkim. The treaty of Tumlong (1861) signed between the Sikkim Empire and the British further consolidated the British influence over Sikkim and provided them with strategic access to the eastern Himalayas. The Duar War (1864-65) and its conclusion through

the Treaty of Sinchula (1865) again made a crucial change where Bhutan ceded the Bengal and Assam Duars to British India, which in turn enabled the British to gain control over the Himalayan gateways. Subsequently, several other administrative reorganizations changed the political geography of this region, such as the separation of Assam from Bengal in 1874, the Partition of Bengal in 1905 and its reversal in 1911, and the separation of Bihar and Orissa in 1912. But the most important political event that created this corridor was the Partition of India in 1947 (Baruah, 2005). Before the partition, rail, road, and river connections linked Northeast India to the rest of India through East Bengal. But after the partition, the Radcliffe Award divided Bengal into East Pakistan (the eastern part of Bengal) and West Bengal. As a result, the district of Dinajpur was also divided between two states. This division affected the transportation severely, and the previous communication routes are now only to be maintained through the narrow Siliguri corridor (Van Schendel, 2005). This corridor was later known as ‘Chicken’s Neck’ and played a significant role in the geopolitics of India. It became more sensitive when China occupied Tibet in 1950 through the Sino-Tibetan Agreement and brought Chinese dominance in the eastern Himalaya. This incident changed the scenario of India in terms of the security environment, and during the 1962 Sino-Indian war, the weaknesses were revealed, which highlighted the urgent requirement for land transportation through this corridor (Chakraborty, 2022). The formation of Bangladesh in 1971 again changed the geopolitical setup; the corridor’s role remained the same in the strategic domain of Eastern India.

The historical culmination of these territorial shifts and geopolitical crises firmly established the Siliguri Corridor’s position as a key strategic bottleneck. Consequently, the policy and academic discussion of the

region have tended to echo these anxieties, viewing the corridor mostly through the prism of defensive realism. Because its very creation was born out of partition and bordered by volatile frontiers, early schol-

Table 1: Historical formation timeline of Siliguri Corridor

Phase	Key Events	Outcome
Colonial Expansion (1816–1865)	Treaty of Sugauli, Darjeeling acquisition, Treaty of Tumlong, Duar War, Treaty of Sinchula	British control established over the eastern Himalayan frontier and North Bengal.
Administrative Reorganization (1874–1912)	Separation of Assam, Partition of Bengal, reunification, separation of Bihar and Orissa	Reconfigured the political geography of eastern India.
Partition and Corridor Formation (1940–1947)	Lahore Resolution, Direct Action Day, Partition of India, Radcliffe Line	Created the Siliguri Corridor as a narrow strategic land bridge.
Post-Partition Consolidation (1950–1959)	Chinese occupation of Tibet, Transfer of Territories Act, Islampur reorganization	Strengthened and consolidated the corridor's territorial structure.
Strategic Securitization (1962 onwards)	Sino-Indian War and subsequent geopolitical developments	Transformed the corridor into one of India's most critical strategic spaces.

ars and strategists naturally prioritized national security over other regional dynamics. This historical context is the crucial backdrop for corridor studies, beginning with the dominant and enduring framework.

3 Thematic Cluster I: The Vulnerability Paradigm: Dominant Themes in Earlier Scholarship

After the formation of corridor in the post-independence period, most of the literature focused on the vulnerability paradigm of this region. Here, the vulnerability paradigm is a common analytic device that tends to see the corridor primarily as a strategic asset under threat. It sees the corridor as narrow, exposed to external attack, and infrastructurally deficient—rather than as a lived, multidimensional regional space. The scholarship highlighted national integrity and security. After Sino-Indian war of 1962, the studies concerned about the infrastructure deficit and probable threats of future. The latest incident of Doklam standoff again intensified the question of security of the corridor. These studies also

suggested recommendations for future steps of India to safeguard the corridor as well as the NE India (Malik, 2015; Farhan, 2021; Barman, 2026). If thematically conceptualized, the vulnerability paradigm can be divided into three heads: military threat literature, Doklam and the Post-2017 Recalibration and Diplomatic Caution Literature (fig. 2).

3.1 Military Threat Literature

The leading strand in corridor scholarship focused on military threats, particularly the scenario of a Chinese advance through the Chumbi Valley into the Siliguri Plains. This type of literature attempted to combine terrain analysis with the probable threats and projected consequences of severance. The literature in this category is pessimistic, where the corridor is considered a choke point only, without drawing any scope of positivity. The scholars focused solely on vulnerabilities such as the inadequate infrastructure of North-East India, the disadvantageous geography of the corridor, and a reactive security approach instead of a proactive one. People associated with strategic studies generally produced this kind of

work. This tradition of literature placed this corridor within the broader arena of high-altitude warfare, using the experience

gathered from the 1962 Sino-Indian War to advocate for strengthening infrastructure and defense preparedness.

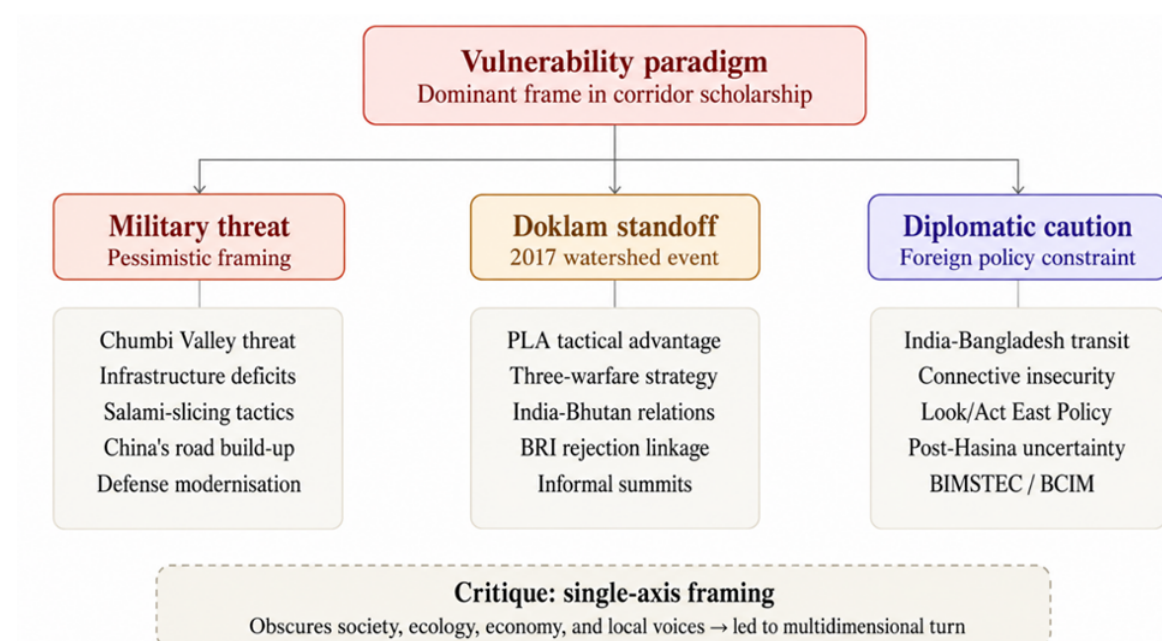


Figure 2: Vulnerability paradigm.

Bisht (2010) highlighted the strategic importance of Chumbi Valley, a tri-junction that links China, India, and Bhutan, where China's expansionist policy in terms of infrastructural development poses a serious threat in the Siliguri corridor. Hence, India intensified the relationship with Bhutan in terms of military aid and cultural bonding. Akhoon and Senthil Kumar (2019), after the Doklam Standoff, expressed the same opinion regarding China's road construction, which threatened the Siliguri Corridor, and argued that the military de-escalation of China is a temporary compromise and that China constantly tries to maintain its dominance in the Himalayan region. Ahmed (2011) also showed his concern regarding the probability of nuclear war and a collusive threat, including Pakistan. He advocated for the limited war concept and diplomatic engagement rather than a force-driven response. The policy paper by EGROW (Foundation for Economic Growth & Welfare) (Singh, 2019) suggested

developing the infrastructure of this corridor by establishing transit treaties with Bangladesh or by constructing tunnels so that it can be protected from any air strikes during conflict with China. The Centre for Land Warfare Studies (2019) advocated for modernization of the Indian Armed Forces and inclusion of high-altitude technology to sustain the hostile Himalayan terrain and to make a defense system against China and Pakistan. Ranade (2023) encouraged converting this choke point into a gateway that will work for regional cooperation and multi-dimensional connectivity.

3.2 Doklam Standoff of 2017 and associated literature

The Doklam standoff in 2017 is a watershed event that increased the substantial body of academic and policy documents on the vulnerability and strategic analysis of the Siliguri Corridor. The immediate question — why India intervened militarily on behalf

of Bhutan and what the implications were for Sino-Indian relations — generated analysis that inevitably circled back to the Siliguri Corridor (Paudel, 2024). Scholars noted that any Chinese construction on the Doklam plateau would have given the People's Liberation Army (PLA) a commanding position over approaches to the corridor, dramatically shortening Chinese tactical reach. The post-Doklam literature thus functioned both as a case study in crisis management and as a renewed argument for investment in India's eastern defenses. Several analysts drew attention to the broader pattern of Chinese infrastructure development in Tibet—roads, rail lines, and military airfields—as evidence of a long-term strategic build-up that required sustained Indian attention rather than episodic crisis response. On account of the Doklam standoff and India's involvement, Paudel (2024) tried to showcase the scenario of landlocked small states that are adjacent to big states. He argued that the small states have to balance their relations with the big neighbours and their hegemonic behaviour to survive and maintain their security and sovereignty. Borah (2017) argued that the temporary settlement at Doklam between India and China doesn't guarantee future peace at this tri-junction between these Asian giants, as no one is willing to make a territorial concession. Bisht et al. (2019) also signified the Doklam standoff, where China implemented all three warfare strategies of psychological, media, and legal warfare against India. However, India, in turn, applied a diplomatic stand by deploying a troop to a third country (Bhutan) to challenge the expansionist activity of China in the Doklam region, which is near the Siliguri Corridor. By considering the three-warfare policy as a permanent stand, the authors suggested India should develop specialized capacities such as language proficiency, monitoring several Chinese institutes, and the creation of tri-service agencies for cyber, space, and special operations to counter future challenges. Ratha (2020) also discussed the three warfare strategies but argued that the

Doklam standoff is the outcome of India's rejection of the Belt and Road Initiative and its deepening strategic alliances with the United States and the Quadrilateral Alliance. He stresses the informal summits as a mature geostrategic step while cautioning that China's expansionist goals will keep the relationship in an uncomfortable situation.

3.3 Diplomatic Caution Literature

A third sub-theme of the vulnerability paradigm was the effect of corridor anxieties on Indian foreign policy, particularly vis-à-vis Bangladesh. The study on India-Bangladesh relations found an inherent Indian hesitancy to allow Dhaka substantial transit access to the corridor or the north-east states, lest the concessions make future security management more difficult. The authors emphasized “connective insecurity,” in which logistics, smuggling, militancy, and everyday survival tactics are closely intertwined (Bhaumik, 2022; Bhutia, 2024). Multiple studies have shown that the isolation of the Northeast through this 20–22 km land link has fuelled insurgency, resource conflicts and economic marginalization, rendering the region extremely sensitive to cross-border dynamics with China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan (Roy, 2018; Middleton, 2020; Malik, 2015). In response, India's Look/Act East policies, regional corridors (Kaladan, BCIM, BIMSTEC), and emerging transport agreements with Bangladesh and other neighbors aim to bypass or decongest Siliguri, lower trade costs, and re-anchor the Northeast as a gateway to ASEAN and a hub for legal commerce, energy, and even healthcare services and medical tourism (Dey, 2021; Malik, 2015; Sarkar, 2024). At the same time, several authors warn that deficient infrastructure, persistent border disputes, smuggling (including narcotics) through alternative routes, and shifting Bangladesh foreign-policy alignments continue to complicate India's strategic calculus, underscoring that diversification of connectivity must

be paired with conflict management, cooperative river-basin and transport regimes, and sustained sub regional diplomacy to stabilize the eastern frontier (Roy, 2018). The same logic applies to the recent post-Hasina scholarship on the present: after the regime change in 2024, the authors talk about India-Bangladesh relations entering a phase of ambiguity and strategic-level recalibration that bears direct implications for Northeast connectivity and India's broader approach to Bangladesh (Bhattacharya, 2025; Dubey, 2024; Das and Arshad, 2026; Bhattacharya, 2026). These studies bolster the idea that corridor anxieties have been a structural constraint on Indian foreign policy in the east, shaping what New Delhi can promise Dhaka and how far it is prepared to convert connectivity into diplomatic concessions.

3.4 Critique of the Vulnerability Paradigm

Indeed, the vulnerability paradigm plays a significant role in terms of strategic management, the probability of risk, and comprehending factors of vulnerability. However, this perspective narrows its focus to a single dimension of the corridor: its vulnerability to external attack. All these studies represent the locational disadvantage, problematic geography, infrastructural lacuna, etc. Hence, the other dimensions related to this corridor, such as society, demography, ecology, economy, and politics, which shape the region in an integrated way, were completely obscured. This scholarship ignored the perspectives of the individuals who live here and constitute the very fabric of this region in terms of livelihood, identities, and society. As a result, these limitations led to broadening the field, and various sections emerged in the contemporary scholarship of this region.

4 Thematic Cluster II: Connectivity, Infrastructure, and Development

The literature also focuses on another major theme including connectivity, development and regional integration (fig. 3). This theme is based on BBIN, economic geography and diplomacy of corridor along Bangladesh border.

4.1 BBIN Framework and Sub regional Connectivity

The Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement, which was signed in 2015, created extensive literature for this region, which connected governance, economics, and geopolitics with sub-regional connectivity. Scholars attempted to understand whether BBIN was really a genuine reorientation of Indian policy toward economic regionalism or mainly a strategic instrument for controlling the smaller neighbours (Taneja et al. 2024). The literature emphasises that the Siliguri Corridor's location makes it a nodal point through which BBIN connectivity must pass. This kind of scholarship describes the various routes, the capacity of existing road infrastructure, and the future economic return in terms of a developed trade scenario. It is directed towards economic significance through sub-regional connectivity, along with strategic importance.

Several studies highlighted how landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan can benefit from the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement for obtaining improved access to the Northeast via Bangladesh, with a significant reduction in time and distance, detouring Siliguri (Hassan, 2016; Mukherji, 2019; Sajjad & Dar, 2025). However, some studies argued that despite various scopes of development, BBIN is one of the least integrated networks globally due to a lack of infrastructure, procedural delays, and soft-infrastructure gaps, such as unharmonized driver licenses and visa regimes, alongside Bhutan's continued environmental ap-

prehensions (CUTS International, 2018; Dappe & Kunaka, 2021; CUTS International, 2023). The scholars suggested upgrading and harmonizing procedures for BBIN to realize its potential in its fullest (Hassan, 2016; Kumar, 2017). The BBIN has been considered in these studies as an important step towards an immediate benefit for these concerned countries rather than waiting for the whole of South Asia's integration through SAARC (Mallick, 2025; Sajjad and Dar, 2025). However, the authors also urged for the decongestion of the Siliguri corridor, which is geopolitically vital yet vulnerable in terms of its narrowness and proximity to international borders. The stress is on multimodal connectivity instead of depending solely on the corridor, including inland waterway transport (IWT) via the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol routes (Ghising, 2024; IWAI, 2017). The scholars projected that an integrated transport system can yield broader economic gain if the concerned countries follow the principles of cooperative federalism and para diplomacy to remove the institutional and regulatory bottlenecks (Basu & Bhowmick, 2021; Dappe & Kunaka, 2021).

4.2 BRI and Connectivity Competition

Another strand of scholarship has assessed China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its consequences for the corridor region. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an infrastructural investment of China in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. The researchers questioned whether it is a competition with India's sub-regional initiatives. In several studies, it is argued that a Chinese-led development project can erode India's connectivity advantage and create economic dependencies. Some scholars also argued that investment and development in the north-east are the outcome of India's response to China's BRI, as it is creating a complicated strategic situation for India. The contemporary scholarship treats China's initiative as both economic and

geopolitical, with infrastructural development deeply inclined toward the projection of power dynamics (Ammu and Ajitha, 2026; Bhutia, 2024; Alam, 2021). This Chinese-led development, according to scholars, is forcing the Government of India to rethink and craft the connectivity strategies rather than to join BRI (Bharti, 2023; Bhutia, 2024).

In South Asia, China's financing of corridors and ports (e.g., CPEC, BCIM concepts, Gwadar) is seen as challenging India's traditional dominance and forcing New Delhi to craft alternative connectivity strategies and partnerships rather than join BRI. The political economy framework stresses that BRI can modify territorial connections and lead to both cooperation and conflict (Ammu and Ajitha, 2026).

4.3 Bangladesh and Transit/ Corridor Diplomacy

In recent corridor scholarship, another important theme is the role of Bangladesh in shaping the connectivity landscape. Earlier, Bangladesh was treated as a passive recipient of Indian decisions. But recent studies recognize Bangladesh as a strategic actor with its own interests in corridor access. Bangladesh attempted to gain access to reach Nepal and Bhutan, and most importantly, the northeastern Indian market for Bangladeshi goods through India. Scholars examined that the Sheikh Hasina government's foreign policy was pragmatic in terms of corridor-related negotiations where she utilized the connectivity demands as diplomatic leverage by striking a balance between external demands and domestic political considerations. Even the post-Hasina regime has created a new uncertainty in these calculations, and the implications that keep corridor diplomacy a live research question.

The Bangladesh focused works on BCIM and regional corridors argue that Bangladesh is not only a responder to India's corridor or connectivity projects, but it also has its own strategies such as ad-

vancement of connectivity, market access and soft-power diplomacy (Hoque, 2024; K.C. and Bhattarai, 2018).

Similarly, the studies on India-Nepal transit diplomacy show that each country attempts to focus only on its own national interest. Here, Nepal, a landlocked country, seeks to get access to ports through India, while India has the bargaining power to give access to this transit due to its geographical position. It shows that providing access to a corridor or seaport is not only a technical or economic perspective but is deeply embedded in the political and strategic domains (Flint and Zhu, 2019; Alder, 2025).

4.4 Economic Geography and Developmental Corridors

Some research has attempted to understand Siliguri Corridor region through the lens of economic geography. These studies examine how infrastructure development and recent connectivity initiatives are transforming the economic scenario of the Siliguri region. Several studies emphasized that Siliguri has become a logistics hub connecting the whole North-East, Bhutan, Nepal,

and Bangladesh and has played an important role in integrating sub-regional connectivity. Additionally, substantial research has also focused on the urban expansion of this region. This kind of literature also discusses the challenges to economic development, such as migration, rising land prices, environmental problems, and uneven development. This kind of literature underscores the issues like uneven development and contested challenges arising from infrastructure-led growth.

Sadovnikova (2021) claimed that in the North-east, connectivity promotes growth through development of roads, power networks, irrigation and banking. However, if the gaps are closed, then this type of corridor-related investment can reduce the disparities and lead to overall regional development. Scholars focused on Siliguri identified it as a logistics and health care hub, as North-East India and neighboring countries are dependent on it. They recommended to develop new trade corridors and infrastructure for future development (Hussain and Roy, 2021; Aich, Banerjee, and Patra, 2025; Rahman, 2024).

4.5 Key Debates and Gaps

The connectivity literature has greatly enriched corridor studies, but they still have imperfections. The BBIN and BRI scholarship is often confined to interstate relations, again focusing predominantly on formal land transport infrastructure—giving less weight to informal cross-border economies—petty trade, labour migration, and currency exchange—which comprise much of the day-to-day economics of this corridor. Compared to similar work on African or Southeast Asian corridors, the developmental corridor literature remains relatively thin and builds on a much thinner base in terms of its grounding in existing global development geography frameworks for South Asia. And despite growing attention to Bangladesh's emerging role, comparable studies of Nepal and Bhutan

corridor-related interests are few and far between.

5 Thematic Cluster III: Borderlands, Ethnicity, and Sub-Conventional Security

The corridor region also tells a story of internal conflicts, movements, sub-conventional security. Hence, substantial amounts of research are also focused on these themes: ethnic literature which is focused on multiple ethnic culture in the whole region, its history, movements associated with ethnicity and cultural background; grey zone literature and cross border networks. People from various dimensions work on this: History, Political Science, Geography, Economics and so on.

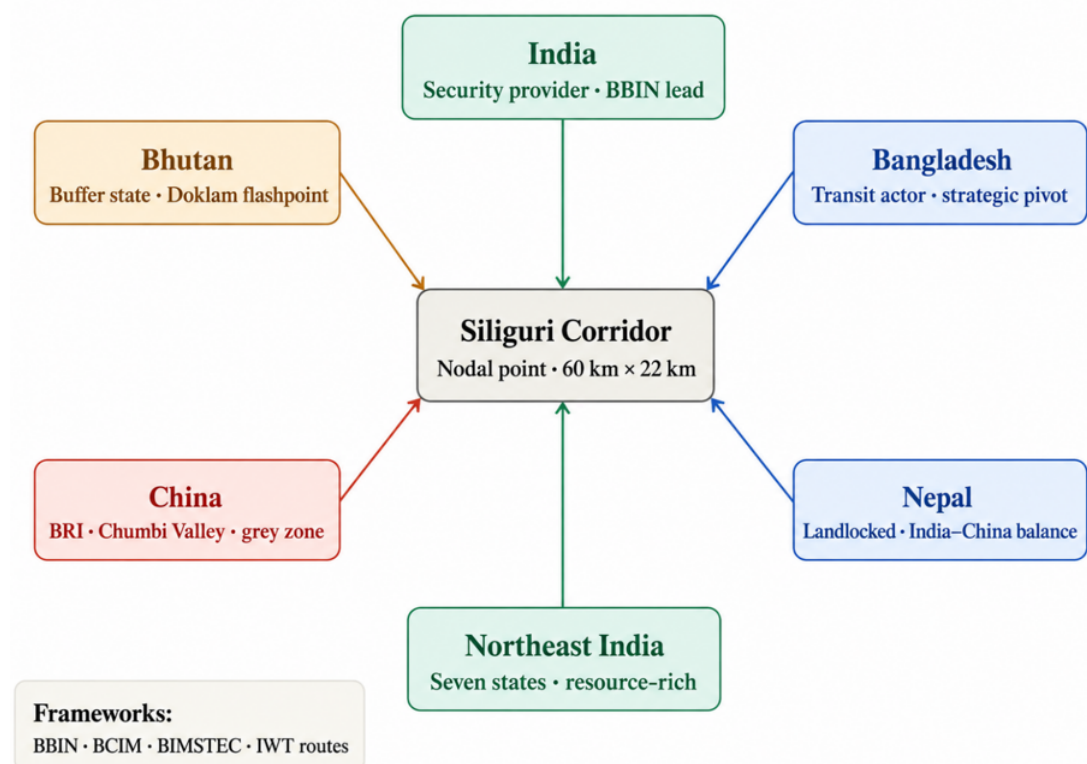


Figure 3: Regional connectivity actors.

5.1 Ethnic Borderland Literature

The Siliguri corridor and its adjacent regions are located at the crossroads of multiple ethnicities and linguistic characteristics. Due to these factors, several movements, including regionalism, have emerged here several times. The demand for a separate state by Gorkha communities and the Dooars, with intermittent intensity since the 1980s, has generated substantial research in this area.

Additionally, the Koch and Rajbanshi communities from Dooars also protested for territorial autonomy and recognition. The studies on the Bodo movement, although not directly related to this region, also shape the security environment of which this corridor region is a part. This research collectively argues that the vulnerability of the corridor and its hinterland is not only related to external attacks but also to internal political instability (Ghising, 2024; Bali, 2025). Das (2024) discussed the Kamtapur movement, which is deeply embedded in the historical identity of the ancient Ka-

mata kingdom and the later princely state of Cooch Behar. He described that after the inclusion of princely state Coochbehar in 1949, the Koch-Rajbongshi community perceived it as a loss of sovereignty and the beginning of their political and cultural marginalization (Das, 2024). The main reasons for this movement were economic disparity, cultural marginalization, and political underrepresentation (Das, 2024). However, Kamtapur People's Party (KPP) always tried to pursue its goals through democratic avenues, but the Kamtapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) converted this movement into an armed insurgency with the help of United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to secure training camps in Bhutan and later shifted to Bangladesh and Myanmar (Basistha, 2016).

The situation is exacerbated further with the Gorkhaland movement in the Darjeeling hills, which considers this corridor a prominent ethnonationalism dictated by socio-political marginalization towards seeking ethnic distinct political identity

(Kaushik, 2009; Bera, 2023). Researchers insisted that the Gorkhaland movement, which was in the 1980s peak of its separatist or ethnic agitation phase, should also be related to marginalization, deprivation, identity, and land as well as governance. These studies noted the limited autonomy of the Darjeeling Hill Gorkha Council (DHGC) and the later formation of the Gorkha Territorial Authority (GTA), which leaves the grievances of this region intact (Lepcha, 2019; Chhetri, 2021; Sharma, Choudhury, and Das, 2022; Chhetri, 2023). In the sphere of internal conflict, another serious issue is illegal migration from Bangladesh, which is often described as a "silent demographic invasion" (Bali, 2025; Ghising, 2024). This situation can be further exaggerated by Pakistan's ISI by using this population to create instability in this region (Bali, 2025).

However, the scholars also reported on India's defense mechanisms, such as the proposal of underground railway tunnels along the corridor to safeguard against surface-based threats (Langeh, 2026; Noor et al., 2026).

5.2 Grey-Zone and Sub-Conventional Conflict Scholarship

A growing concern in contemporary scholarship is noted in the domain of grey-zone and sub-conventional conflict. The main argument is how the state and non-state actors use various strategic tools other than direct warfare, such as developing criminal networks, economic coercion, propaganda, ethnic movements, etc. Scholars argued that as the Siliguri Corridor is situated near many international boundaries, the region is vulnerable in terms of the implementation of these tactics, e.g., China's multi-domain tools instead of direct conflict (Lin et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2026). Analysts have examined allegations of Pakistani intelligence engagement with northeastern insurgent groups, Chinese commercial penetration of the Nepalese and Bangladeshi economies as a form of strategic leverage,

and the use of organized crime networks for political influence. After the Doklam stand-off, this kind of literature has increased in number. Authors described that China has implemented a 'geopolitical strategy' where China, instead of direct armed conflicts, is building infrastructure in the Sino-Tibetan frontier region, which will develop infrastructure and maintain administrative control (Hader et al., 2025; Lathar, 2025). Another example was the construction of 22 villages inside Bhutanese territory by 2024. This tactic is also known as "salami-slicing" (Singh & Kalra, 2026). Additionally, China is trying to be involved in sensitive projects framed within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This kind of approach, as per the researchers, basically aims to create structural dependencies among India's neighbors and destabilize the integrity of the North-east Region from within (Lin et al., 2022; Mehta & Yumlembam, 2025). Furthermore, cyber operations and critical power infrastructure by state-sponsored actors are other tools of domination by China (Lin et al., 2022). However, the scholars also informed about the defense mechanism of India, such as the proposition of underground railway tunnels through the corridor to safeguard from surface-based threats (Langeh, 2026; Noor et al., 2026).

5.3 Cross-Border Networks

Scholars have also examined the corridor's extensive cross-border networks for people, goods, and information that are considered illegal trade and economic activity. Specifically, in the south and south-east border, the Indo-Bangladesh border, this kind of activity is profound. Various studies on cattle smuggling show how the traders, intermediaries, and state agents of both sides are actively engaged in running this illicit trade, which extends from northern and western India, where slaughtering of cows is banned, through the North-east to Bangladesh, where it has a great demand (Sur, 2021; Thu, 2022). Following the same direction, Wasima (2024) identified drivers

of cattle smuggling such as economic imperatives, high demand for Indian cattle in Bangladesh, economic incentives, poor border management and maintenance, and the risks associated with smuggling. Brown et al. (2023) found that cross-border trade in the West Bengal borderlands has intricately connected various forms of economic activity, both legal and formal or illegal and informal, through actors such as local traders, politicians, border inhabitants, local officials, NGOs, and journalists, all tied together in a single thread. Shewly and Nadiruzzaman (2017) argued that the responsible factors of this kind of illegal trade are economic globalization, war, and poor border management. All these studies questioned the border management and regulatory systems of states, while smugglers disregard regulations and challenge

sovereignty (Su, 2020).

5.4 Synthesis: What Contemporary Scholarship Tells Us

After reviewing these three clusters, it is found that the geopolitical perspective, although until now the most important perspective, has also been contributed to by several other domains with substantial research on this region. However, themes like connectivity, the Doklam standoff, and the economy are also co-existing with the central theme of military threat and geopolitical vulnerability. The corridor is now studied under multiple lenses rather than strictly confined to vulnerability analysis (fig. 4). The internal dynamics in terms of ethnography, geography, and sociology shape this region, which again is shaped by the external pressures it faces.

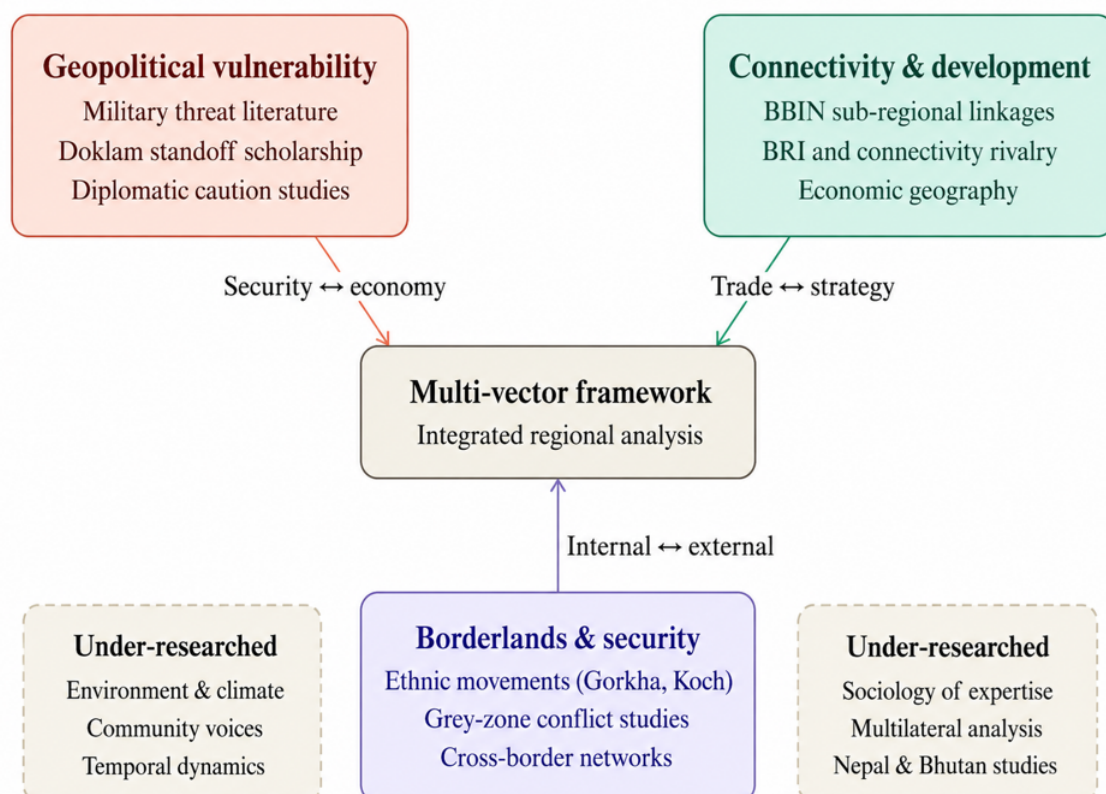


Figure 4: Thematic multi-vector framework. The three scholarly clusters and their interconnections, with the dashed boxes highlighting the dimensions that current research largely leaves unaddressed.

Furthermore, the three clusters have converged on a shared insight, although the researchers are from different disciplines. It is noted, for example, that when strategic studies discuss the probability of corridor severance, they also signify political or economic vulnerability, akin to strategic vulnerability. Similarly, those studying connectivity also prioritize understanding military balance. Even in the case of studying the Gorkhaland or Rajbanshi movement, scholars also attempt to understand the impact of internal instability on the strategic environment. Hence, the three clusters are more interconnected than their respective practitioners.

Additionally, the field is unevenly developed. The number of studies on military assessment and connectivity is large and relatively well-resourced, as these benefit from various defense institutes, think tanks, and development research centers, but research is not substantial when the search is focused on borderlands and the sub-conventional security literature. Even the environmental perspectives—disaster, climate change, and ecological fragility—are missing from strategic scholarship, which is essential for understanding vulnerability properly. The voices of local people are also missing, which is crucial for any kind of development.

6 Research Gaps and Future Directions

The review has identified several significant gaps in the existing literature that represent productive directions for future research (fig. 5).

6.3 Temporal Dynamics

In the literature, the strategic significance attributed to the corridor is often treated as a static characteristic of the landscape.

6.1 Local and Community-Level Perspectives

What is most glaringly missing from research on the Siliguri Corridor is the voices of the people who live in those corridors. A strategic analyst described the corridor as an empty strip of territory; a development economist proposed it as a flow of transactions that remain debilitated, not as a place where people live. The ethnographic and community-based research on how tea garden workers, border traders, displaced communities, and local administrators reproduce or escape these strategic imperatives is almost non-existent. Rather than lending local color to the analysis, this kind of research would likely produce dynamics—coping strategies, informal economies of risk, and emergent local governance arrangements—that meaningfully recast higher-level scholarship.

6.2 Sociology of Strategic Expertise

The review reflexively raises one question that it cannot address comprehensively: who produces corridor knowledge and how. The dominant voices in strategic scholarship are retired military officers and think-tank scholars based in New Delhi, who constitute the strongest strategic voices in the corridor. The positioning of actors within institutional moorings and career trajectories will determine which questions are asked and why, what evidence is considered valid, and what types of policy recommendations may either risk or safeguard their career advancement. Mapping a sociology of corridor expertise—i.e., how scholars produce, circulate, and contest knowledge about the corridor—would add value by clarifying assumptions that often serve as background conditions.

The salience of the corridor, however, has waxed and waned over time — rising after the 1962 war, diminishing after the 1971 settlement, strengthening again after Doklam, and perhaps poised to change once

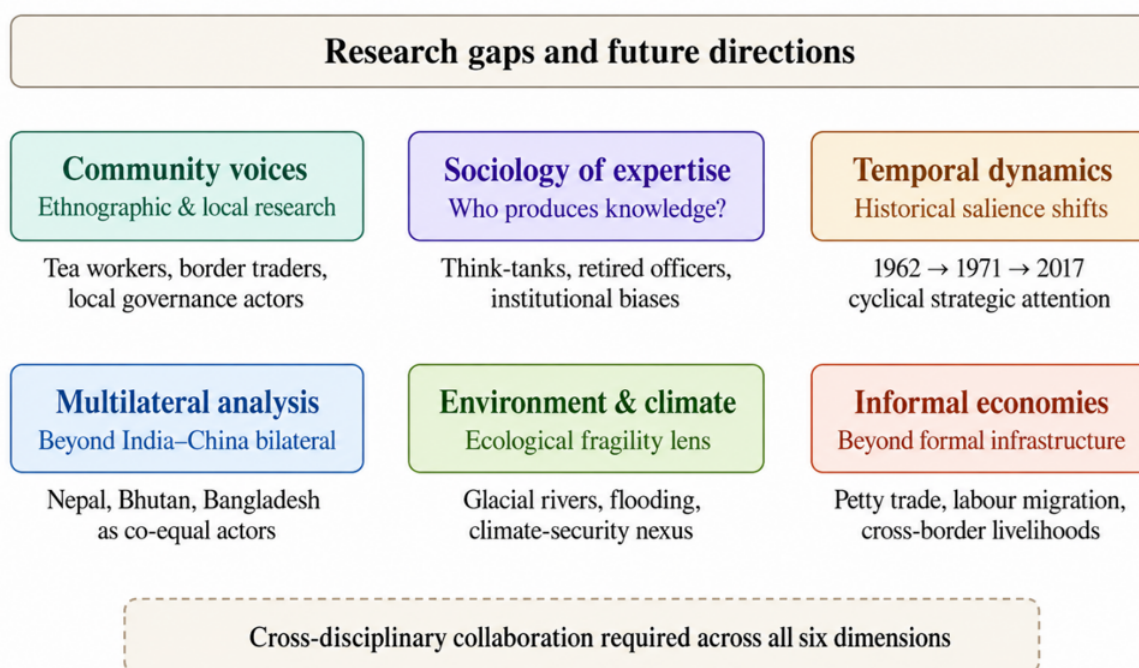


Figure 5: Research gaps and future directions. Six dimensions where current scholarship is thin, together forming the agenda for the next phase of corridor studies.

more due to climate-change-related transformations in the Himalayan glacial system. Tracking how and why the corridor's strategic weight has varied over time would yield a richer dynamic analysis of regional security than is presently found in the literature.

6.4 Multilateral Analysis

Corridor scholarship's fixation on India-China bilateralism has also starved inquiry into other relevant actors. Nepal's tightrope walks between India and China, and what it means for the security of the corridor's north-facing border, is the subject of periodic bursts of scholarly interest rather than continuous examination. Bhutan's historic opening to China—relevant to Doklam, as it is ongoing—has been discussed mostly in diplomatic magazines rather than in academic journals. Bangladesh's ascendance as a strategic actor with stakes in the corridor is covered relatively well but could be better theorized. Analytical accounts would be significantly deepened by a multilateral framework that views the corridor as a node within a regional system shaped by the in-

teractions of at least five sovereign actors.

6.5 Environment and Climate

Current scholarship lacks a comprehensive environmental and climate perspective. One of the world's most environmentally fragile zones is the Siliguri Corridor, the transition from the Himalayan mountain system to the Bengal delta. It becomes an area of high rainfall, glacially fed rivers, dense biodiversity, and extreme vulnerability to flooding and landslides. Climate change will impact the Siliguri Corridor, making it more susceptible. Climate change will most likely impact the infrastructure, economy, and habitation of the corridor zone. Unfortunately, the strategic literature has mostly ignored these. It is not enough to focus solely on climate and environmental issues in corridor security scholarship. Policymakers need to facilitate continued environmental disruptions that pose security challenges of the same order of magnitude as conventional military threats.

7 Conclusion

This article reviewed recent research on the Siliguri Corridor and aimed to reveal how the area has expanded beyond the “Chicken’s Neck” vulnerability paradigm, as largely presented in historical research. The results point to a picture of genuine but uneven improvement. Recent research on the Siliguri Corridor has moved beyond the analysis of a single vector. Military concerns, research on the area’s connectivity, development and borderlands research, and sub-conventional security research approach the corridor from separate standpoints and create a more complete picture of it than any other approach could. The field has greater research diversity and more complex, conceptual studies of the corridor’s internal dynamics.

However, the review has shown that a lack of community-focused studies, a lack of self-reflective studies on the production of knowledge, and a lack of studies considering time, space, context, and above all, a lack of environmental studies demonstrates the boundaries of modern research. In much of the current research, the Siliguri Corridor continues to be viewed as a strategic corridor to be secured rather than a complex, inter-related regional context. The “chicken’s neck” metaphor, while evocative, is overwhelmingly a poor representation of the research, as it focuses on the narrowest and most vulnerable part of a very complex system. It very much invites researchers to explore the most vulnerable point in a regional system while neglecting its most common day-to-day functions. The multi-vector framework presented here is an example of an unfinished theory, an analytical orientation for how we treat the corridor’s geopolitics, development, and social systems. The result is an example of a triple-layer approach, rather than a single-layer one. This framework allows for greater complexity. Due to the demands of complexity, this approach most certainly entails cross-disciplinary collaboration and engagement with the unexpected.

Integrative scholarship of this kind will allow for better governance of the region. Although better scholarship does not necessarily require better policy, the two are related. The dominance of the vulnerability framework in the literature has confined policy options in the region: how environments are shaped by infrastructure, foreign relations with Bangladesh, and how northeastern insurgencies are approached, to name a few. While a more integrative scholarship of the Siliguri Corridor will not provide policy options for the region’s difficult strategic dilemmas, it will place those dilemmas within the region’s (un)certainly and complexity and express them through multiple metaphors rather than a single one.

Acknowledgements

This study was supported by a research grant from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), Ministry of Education, Government of India, under the 2nd Call for ICSSR Longitudinal Studies in Social and Human Sciences (File No. 43/2nd LSS/2025-1921-GOV/SCD).

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