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The Circle of Kings and the Chokepoint: A New Look at Kautilya's Mandala Theory and Its Relation to the Strategic Security of the Siliguri Corridor

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Abstract

The Siliguri Corridor, sometimes known as India's "Chicken's Neck," is one of the most perilous regions in South Asia. This land-based chokepoint is the only way for the mainland to access India's Northeastern region, which is rich in resources (Bharali, 2020, p. 1). At its narrowest point, it is only 22 km wide. This essay reevaluates the strategic security of the Siliguri Corridor using Kautilya's Mandala (Circle of States) from the ancient Indian classic, the Artha shastra. This research amalgamates classical realism in statecraft with contemporary multi-domain security issues, situating India as the Viji Gishu (the nucleus, aspiring power) and its bordering nations within concentric circles of intrinsic conflict and potential collaboration. This study suggests that the Ari (China, a natural enemy) is increasing its presence through the Chumbi Valley and the Doklam Plateau. Kautilya's text also describes Madhyama (Middle Ruler) as a state positioned between the aspiring conqueror and the enemy, acting as a conceptual buffer, and Mitra as an ally (Gautam et al., 2015, p. 53). Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh exemplify these states. The results suggest that military defences alone will not be enough to protect the corridor; instead, they require Kautilyan Upayas (diplomatic strategies). This means improving infrastructure, fostering economic interdependence with these buffer countries, and employing a diverse range of diplomatic methods to address both new and enduring challenges.

Keywords: Siliguri Corridor, Kautilya, Mandala Theory, Chokepoint, Geopolitics, Indian Foreign Policy, Strategic Security

1. Introduction

A country's location is the most important factor affecting its main strategy. The Siliguri Corridor is the most visible danger to safety in the Indian subcontinent. This small piece of land is the only way to reach India's eight northeastern states from the rest of the country (Ranade, 2023). At its narrowest point, it is only 20 to 22 miles wide. In the north of West Bengal. The corridor is a classic strategic chokepoint since it is close to China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and is surrounded by Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. If this link were to be cut, more than 50 million Indians would be cut off, and a section of India that is vitally important to its "Act East" agenda would be affected.

Contemporary strategic literature predominantly analyses the corridor in terms of its infrastructure's susceptibility, its ability to counteract attacks (A2/AD), and its efficacy in hybrid warfare. But the idea of using native strategic frameworks to make this less of a problem has a big gap. This essay seeks to address this problem by drawing on Kautilya's Mandala theory, an important idea in ancient Indian classical realism. The Mandala hypothesis, first proposed in the 4th-century BCE Artha Shastra, posits that geometry and linkages might help us understand how countries interact. It emphasizes physical proximity, power optimization, and coalition alteration as paramount variables.

The primary objective of this study is to re-examine the security situation in the Siliguri Corridor utilizing the Mandala framework. This paper gives a culturally aware and practical strategic framework for dealing with the weaknesses of the Chicken's Neck by putting state actors in the area around the corridor into Kautilyan archetypes: the Viji Gishu (India), the Ari (China), the Mitra (Bangladesh), and the Madhyama (Nepal and Bhutan).

2. Kautilya's Mandala Theory as a Theoretical Framework

The Artha shastra, authored by Kautilya (also known as Chanakya), is a foundational text in realist political theory, published thousands of years before Machiavelli and Hobbes. The Mandala thesis, which postulates that the world is in turmoil and that governments must strengthen and carefully manage their alliances to survive, underpins Kautilya's foreign policy.

The Mandala is a conceptual framework for understanding the rings surrounding a core state. This network of countries has Viji Gishu as its central actor. The ambitious conqueror, or the government, seeks to defend and advance its own interests. The twelve most significant players are chosen based on their proximity to the Viji Gishu.

Ari (The Enemy): The Viji Gishu's neighbour to the north. Kautilya posits that localized boundaries inevitably lead to disputes over territory, resources, and sovereignty, categorizing proximate neighbours as "natural enemies".

Mitra (The Ally): The country that is close to the Ari. Because of the proverb "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," the Mitra and the Viji Gishu both want to keep the Ari subdued.

Madhyama, or the Middle King, is situated between the Ari and the Viji Gishu. It has enough power to upset the balance of power and can aid or injure either side.

Udasina (the Neutral King): A strong country that is far away and does not have to engage in conflict immediately, but might intervene at any moment.

Kautilya argued that these classifications are not fixed; instead, they are dynamic and shaped by the overarching goal of state welfare (Yogakshema). He devised the Shadgunya, a six-part framework for foreign policy that helps navigate difficult partnerships.

This framework comprises six strategies: Sandhi (peace/treaty), Vighraha (war), Asana (neutrality), Yana (preparation for mobilization), Samsraya (seeking protection), and Dvaidhibhava (dual policy). In addition,

statecraft employs four Upayas: Sama (peacekeeping), Dana (gifts or economic incentives), Bheda (sowing discord), and Danda (use of force).

3. How geography helped the Siliguri Corridor come to be

You need to know about the geography and history of the Siliguri Corridor before you can use the Mandala structure appropriately. The corridor is not a normal geopolitical feature because of colonial cartography and the sad division of the Indian subcontinent in 1947. People couldn't travel by land or water between the Northeast and Calcutta once East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was cut off. This made it harder for India to reach Calcutta, which wasn't that far away (Ghising, 2024).

There are a lot of people in the hallway. It has the most important National Highways 31 and 31A, the Northeast Frontier Railway (a network of broad-gauge railways), important oil pipelines, and centres for fibre optic connections. The area is mainly flat, which makes it easier for armoured units to manoeuvre fast. Being close to the Himalayas also gives enemy soldiers on higher ground a distinct topographic edge in Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) and artillery targeting (Ranade, 2023).

3.1 The Cartographic Trauma: The Radcliffe Line and the Building of the Choke Point

To really understand the challenges the Siliguri Corridor has now, you need to look at how maps showed it in 1947. The corridor used to be a natural geographic barrier, but when the Indian subcontinent was broken apart, it became an artificial geopolitical oddity. The Brahmaputra and Barak river systems, along with land-based railroads that ended at the ports of Chittagong and Calcutta, connected the Northeast to the rest of British India before 1947.

The Radcliffe Boundary Commission created a boundary that suddenly shut off these historic supply routes. This line split East Pakistan into two (now Bangladesh). The Commission's job, which didn't take the area's terrain into account, made it hard for India to reach its northeastern boundary. The only way to reach there was via the narrow Phansidewa-Panitanki portion in the West Bengal districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling (Chatterji, 1999). There was a 22-kilometre strip of land connecting the mainland to a region roughly 262,000 square kilometres in size, which is almost 8% of India's land area.

This historical event had a significant effect on the Mandala's spatial geometry from a Kautilyan perspective. The split nearly ruined Viji Gishu (India) for good. Kautilya made it obvious that utilizing geography to divide states is not a good idea. He said that areas that aren't connected are more prone to rebellion (Kantakasodhana) and being invaded from the outside. India had to quickly transit all its military and civilian commodities through this narrow land corridor because it could no longer use the Chittagong port. This was the beginning of the security problems we still face today.

4. A Different Way to Use the Mandala at the Choke Point

The Kautilyan Mandala is a fantastic little site to view in action. India is the Viji Gishu in this portion of the world. Many other communities in the area seek to cross its borders and trade with it.

4.1 The Ari's Advance: The Chumbi Valley Dagger and China

The Kautilyan model says that the People's Republic of China is the main Ari (natural adversary). The border between China and mainland India is long and disputed, but the Siliguri Corridor is especially at risk in the Chumbi Valley of the Tibet Autonomous Region. The Chumbi Valley is located between Bhutan and the Indian state of Sikkim. It looks like a sharp dagger. The southernmost part of the valley is just 130 miles from the Siliguri Corridor.

Kautilyan says that the Ari wants to use Viji Gishu's shortcomings to their own benefit. The standoff in Doklam in 2017 is a prime example of this. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) tried to find new ways to

reach the Jampheri Ridge. If the Ari had conquered this ridge, they could have seen the Siliguri Corridor from a long way away and shot at it. This would have reduced India's strategic depth. The Kautilyan philosophy of Yana (prepared for war) is well shown by China's continued building of dual-use infrastructure, surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites, and reinforced bunkers in the Chumbi Valley. Because of this, the Viji Gishu has to constantly send the Tri Shakti Corps and a lot of military supplies to the area.

4.2 The Madhyama Buffer: What Nepal and Bhutan Don't Know About Their Plans

Kautilya thought that the Madhyama were very important. These are the states that protect the Ari and the Viji Gishu. The Siliguri Corridor is to the north of Bhutan and to the west of Nepal.

India used to utilize Sama (mediation) and Dana (economic aid) to keep these Himalayan kingdom's closely attached to New Delhi's security system. The 1949 Indo-Bhutan Treaty of Friendship and the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship are two modern examples of how to make friends.

The Mandala idea suggests that coalitions don't last long and that both sides get what they desire. In the last few years, China (the Ari) has employed Dana (via investments in the Belt and Road Initiative) and Bheda (by inciting fury against India's perceived domination) to draw the Madhyama states into its sphere of influence. When politics in Nepal shifts, they often play the "China card" against India, putting the western side of the corridor at risk. China has also utilized the "salami-slicing" strategy by developing villages in the disputed Bhutanese area along the border, such as the Amo Chu river basin. This makes Bhutan feel like they have to settle border issues in a way that sends Chinese soldiers closer to the Chicken's Neck. If India wants to keep the route open, it needs to stop the Madhyama from teaming up with the Ari.

4.3 The Southern Flank: Bangladesh as the Mitra or Parsnighraha

Bangladesh is to the south of the corridor. Kautilyan argues that while things are going well in Dhaka, Bangladesh is a Mitra (friend), but when things are going terribly, it is a Parsnighraha (a rearward opponent that might hit the Viji Gishu's weak flank).

Bangladesh is a very important Mitra when governments work together. Bangladesh is working hard to reduce the Siliguri Corridor's geographical disadvantage by allowing India to pass through. India can now use the ports of Chittagong and Mongla. The Kautilyan principle says that you shouldn't put too much faith in one item going wrong. So, it's a good idea to provide the Northeast with a few means to get there by land and by sea.

But things may get quite dangerous in Bangladesh when things aren't going well, or people aren't nice. There have been problems with illegal immigration, smuggling, and the movement of rebel groups that use the southern border as a safe place to dwell for a long time. The Siliguri Corridor would be completely cut off if the Ari (China) built ports or airbases along the Indian border that could be used for both military and civilian purposes.

5. A Kautilyan Order for Strategic Countermeasures

The Siliguri Corridor can't merely rely on a physical defence plan to get stronger. Kautilya's way of running a country calls for a proactive, multi-pronged approach that involves diplomacy, infrastructure development, and psychological deterrence.

5.1 Trusting each other to get stronger (Sama and Dana)

Kautilya believed that depending too much on Danda (military strength) to protect weak frontiers was a terrible idea. The Artha shastra says that you can't just use force to protect a site like the Siliguri Corridor;

you also have to consider the politics and economy of the Mandala surrounding it. Today, the Viji Gishu (India) primarily uses Sama (settling disputes and fostering diplomatic relations) and Dana (financial incentives, aid, and infrastructure investment) to get things done. The fundamental strategic goal is to make the Madhyama states (Nepal and Bhutan) and the Mitra states (Bangladesh) rely on each other unfairly. This will change them from being passive geographic barriers into active partners in maintaining the corridor's stability.

The Madhyama connects to the rest of the world through business and energy.

Nepal and Bhutan, two Himalayan countries, defined the security limits for the choke point to the north and west. India needs to do more to make its institutions work together more smoothly so it can counter China's aggressive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects, which are a hostile, competitive use of Dana.

Bhutan achieves this very successfully using "hydropower diplomacy." For example, the Tala, Punatsangchhu, and Mangdechhu dams are all huge run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects that New Delhi funds, develops, and then imports extra electricity from (Sikri, 2023). This is the way Bhutan protects its money. Most of Bhutan's GDP comes from hydropower. The same is true for Nepal, where open-border transit protocols, cross-border oil pipelines (such as the Motihari-Amlekhgunj pipeline), and digital public infrastructure (such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI)) all help strengthen social and economic ties. This structural Dana application makes sure that if China tries to mess with the Siliguri Corridor, it will hurt the economies of Thimphu and Kathmandu. This keeps their land safe and defends their nation's sovereignty.

Making peace and keeping the Mitra safe by connecting transit

The southern side of the corridor is greatly affected by Dhaka's geopolitical orientation. Bangladesh has always felt like an outsider due to border disputes and the sharing of river water. India's choice to settle these sovereign disagreements, especially by signing the historic 2015 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), shows that Sama is functioning. India may get rid of something that has long caused problems between the two countries by relocating the troublesome enclaves. This provided the government with the political support it needed to return to working toward its bigger goals.

India has built on this bedrock of peace by sending billions of dollars in concessional Lines of Credit (LoCs) to build infrastructure that brings people together. This entails restoring rail links that existed before the split, such as the Haldibari-Chilahati line, and ensuring that people can access and travel to and from the ports of Chattogram and Mongla. India has a significant say in where the choke point is because it invests in many ways to move products. The Viji Gishu now has backup supply lines through the Mitra. These will keep the Northeastern states running even if the landmass of the Siliguri Corridor is put in danger.

The Strategic Dividend: Raising the Enemy's Geopolitical Cost as Much as Possible

The major goal of sending Sama and Dana to the Chicken's Neck is to erect a "moat" around it that no one can see for diplomatic reasons. India makes things worse by fully integrating the area's economies. If the Ari tried to stop the way with a kinetic thrust from the Chumbi Valley or a grey-zone barrier, it wouldn't be a struggle between India and the Ari anymore. Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal will all face economic challenges at the same time. This Kautilyan interdependence stops aggressiveness by making it more expensive for the enemy to attack in other parts of the world. This makes it clear that attacking the corridor is the same as attacking the complete regional subsystem.

5.2 Durga Vidhana and Danda: Moving backup systems and defences

Kautilya claimed that diplomacy (Sama and Dana) was the greatest way to rule a country. He was also quite realistic about the need for a strong force (Danda) and the need to safeguard borders (Durga

Vidhana). The militarisation and fortification of the Siliguri Corridor exemplify the enduring use of Kautilyan concepts in modern circumstances.

The Tri Shakti Corps and Moving Forward

India has deployed many soldiers to the area around the Chumbi Valley corridor to guard against the Ari (China), which it sees as a threat to its existence. The Tri Shakti Corps, which is part of the XXXIII Corps of the Indian Army, is responsible for keeping this area safe. Sukna, a little north of Siliguri, is where the main office is located. The Viji Gishu's standing Danda (military force) is made up of three mountain divisions: the 17th (Gangtok), the 20th (Binna Guri), and the 27th (Kalimpong). These groupings are meant to use offensive and defensive techniques.

The usage of the 17 Mountain Strike Corps (Brahmastra Corps) indicates that the army can do more than only protect itself; it can also stop threats. Kautilya calls this Yana, which means making ready for battle and moving troops. India intends to stop the PLA from fast closing the passage by placing striking forces in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) that can immediately launch counter-offensives.

Air Superiority and Strongholds in Many Places

In the 21st century, Durga Vidhana (fortification) is more than just land-based garrisons. It now controls the sky. Two of the most important airbases protecting the corridor are Bagdogra Airport and Hasimara Air Force Station in West Bengal. The Dassault Rafale multi-role fighter squadrons at Hasimara are a strategic force multiplier (Singh, 2021). These systems can fire SCALP cruise missiles that can hit targets deep inside enemy territory and Meteor air-to-air missiles that can kill targets from a long way away. This helps the Viji Gishu destroy enemy tanks and artillery groups in the Chumbi Valley before they reach the tunnel.

More planning

Kautilya authored full chapters about how to safely deploy troops and supplies. India is working on creating new, stronger logistics networks since it knows that National Highway 31 and the only broad-gauge railway line that goes through the area are easy targets for precision-guided missiles (PGMs) and sabotage. The Sevoke-Rangpo railway track goes via tunnels in the Himalayas, which is magnificent. India is burying vital infrastructure to keep the Ari's ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) capabilities and artillery barrages from getting to its supply channels (Ranade, 2023).

5.3 Putting the Upayas into action: employing buffer states to make diplomatic manoeuvres

The positions of the Madhyama (middle) and Mitra (ally) states in the Mandala matrix set the Viji Gishu (centre power) security threshold. Kautilya said that using Danda (military force) too often was not a good idea. Instead, he said they should use Sama (conciliation) and Dana (economic incentives or presents) in a less obvious way to preserve their strategic advantages. India needs a plan that links the economies and security of Bangladesh and Bhutan to New Delhi, making the Siliguri Corridor harder to attack. There will be a massive "moat" of diplomacy at the place where the road meets the river.

5.3.1 Bangladesh as the Main Mitra: Dana and Sama's Guide to Getting Through the Chokepoint

Bangladesh lies along the Siliguri Corridor, a strategic nightmare. In Kautilyan statecraft, a bordering state located adjacent to or behind the Viji Gishu's primary area of operations may be designated as either a Parsnighraha (an enemy that attacks while the main force is engaged elsewhere) or a loyal Mitra (ally). The main purpose of India's "Neighbourhood First" program is to turn Bangladesh from a structural barrier into a Mitra (Pant & Bhattacharya, 2020).

India has employed Sama (conciliation) to settle long-standing disagreements that had produced a wedge between Dhaka and India. The signing of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) in 1974 is the best example of what Sama means. India solved long-standing issues between countries by swapping bad

enclaves and entirely clearing the border. After this, many people felt good about politics. Before Dana could start working, she had to make peace.

Dana now has uneven investments, lines of credit (LoCs), and infrastructure that connects them. Bangladesh has received billions of dollars in concessional lines of credit (LoCs) from India to help improve connections. This Dana is strategically advantageous because it runs along the Siliguri Corridor. India is neutralizing the chokepoint by signing significant transportation deals that make it easier for Indian goods to reach the ports of Chattogram and Mongla. It's also bringing back historic train routes like the Akhaura-Agartala and Haldibari-Chilahati lines. The Indian government has stressed that there are other safe ways to get things done in Bangladesh. If there is a problem in the Chumbi Valley that shortens the Phansidewa-Panitanki length, these routes can be used to serve the Northeastern states. The Mitra makes it tougher for the Ari (China) to cut off the Viji Gishu by bringing Sama and Dana together.

5.3.2 Bhutan as the Weak Madhyama: Fighting the Ari's Bheda

Bangladesh has other routes to get around, but Bhutan is the first line of defence in the territory, preventing the Chumbi Valley from entering the Siliguri Corridor from the north. According to the Mandala model, Bhutan is the best Madhyama, or intermediate state. It is a strategically crucial buffer that can affect the balance of power.

The Ari (China) has always used Bheda (the act of causing conflict and division) and psychological pressure to block New Delhi's security umbrella from reaching Thimphu. They know how important Bhutan's location is. China is using a "salami-slicing" tactic by creating dual-use border villages (Xiaokang) in conflict zones, including the Amo Chu river basin and the Doklam plateau. This is to get Bhutan to agree to a border deal. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) would be quite close to the Jampheri Ridge if Bhutan ceded its western sections to China. This would let them clearly see the Siliguri Corridor and shoot at it from a distance.

India fights back because it passionately believes in Dana and Samsraya (association and mutual protection). The India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty was amended in 2007 to ensure that neither country can use its territory for activities that could put the other country's security at risk. This means that the two countries need to work closely together on matters that matter to them (Muni, 2020). But legal frameworks aren't enough on their own; they also need to be connected in some way.

India usually utilizes Dana in Bhutan through "hydropower diplomacy." For example, India pays for and builds massive run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects in Bhutan, such as the Mangdechhu, Punatsangchhu, and Tala projects, and then buys the excess electricity from them (Sikri, 2023). This hydro revenue accounts for most of Bhutan's GDP and foreign exchange reserves. The Viji Gishu links India's energy infrastructure to Bhutan's economy, which keeps the Madhyama strong. Because of this, the Ari have a hard time getting what they want through powerful diplomacy or economic incentives. Because of this uneven dependence, China has difficulty reaching the Siliguri Corridor via Bhutan. The two nations will work together to halt it.

5.3.3 The Udasina Threat: Upayas Didn't Work

Kautilya also discusses the Udasina, a state that cares about nothing and seeks to remain absolutely neutral. India's diplomatic Upayas don't necessarily include Dhaka and Thimphu. If China and India go to war, these countries might keep out of the way. This would mean that India couldn't use their roads, planes, or espionage networks. A Chinese invasion would be the worst-case scenario for the Siliguri Corridor. The Madhyama and Mitra states that are close by likewise succumb to Chinese grey-zone pressure and won't work with New Delhi. India can't just keep utilizing Sama and Dana all the time; it has to do it to protect its land.

6. The Tusnimyuddha 21st Century Multi-Domain Threat Matrix

Kautilya claimed that the greatest method for a country to cope with an adversary is to make them harmless without having to battle them. The Chumbi Valley's collection of armoured columns and artillery poses a direct, physical threat to the Siliguri Corridor. The Artha shastra calls this Tusnimyuddha (silent or covert war), carried out by a group of Gudhapurusha (secret spies) who use sabotage, subversion, and psychological manipulation (Boesche, 2003). In today's strategic environment, Tusnimyuddha has become Multi-Domain Operations (MDO). This encompasses cyber warfare, electronic warfare (EW), and information operations (IO). For the Ari (China), these non-kinetic vectors offer a covert, asymmetric means to rapidly sever the Chicken's Neck before any firearm is discharged.

6.1 Cyber and Electronic Warfare (EW): Blinding the Viji Gishu

The Siliguri Corridor is a small area, hence its important infrastructure is constrained by its size. The 22-kilometre-wide funnel is used by cars and trains. Still, it also carries critical optical fibre communication cables and regional power grids that connect the Northeastern states to the rest of India. From a multi-domain perspective, this concentration makes the cyber operations target environment particularly useful.

China's state-sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat (APT) groups, such as Red Echo and Red Foxtrot, are assaulting India's vital infrastructure more and more, like load dispatch canisters and telecommunications hubs. A planned cyberattack on the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) systems of the regional power grid might block train signals, screw up military supplies, and blind early-warning radar networks at Hashimara and Bagdogra in the Siliguri Corridor.

The People's Liberation Army's Strategic Support Force (SSF) also plans and conducts numerous electronic warfare strikes. The Ari is on the Tibetan Plateau at a higher altitude, which gives it a unique geographical advantage in employing electromagnetic countermeasures (ECM). Before the war, the Viji Gishu's C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) networks would need to be turned off. It would be challenging to protect the corridor if the Tri Shakti Corps' command nodes couldn't communicate with troops already in the field or with attack planes due to extensive electromagnetic spectrum denial. This is what Tusnimyuddha wanted.

6.2 Information Operations (IO) and Bheda, or the Use of Internal Fault Lines

Kautilya was greatly attracted by the idea of Kantakasodhana, which implies getting rid of "thorns" or threats from within. He stated an enemy will always try to use a state's own social and political problems against it, a method known as Bheda (sowing division) to bring it down from within. The politics and the people of the Siliguri Corridor are an ideal backdrop for modern information operations.

People from many different cultures and languages can meet and converse in the hall. People in the northern hills of Darjeeling have long been calling for Gorkhaland statehood. Illegal immigration and clashes between different groups are making life hard for people who live in the Terai and Dooars areas (Subba, 1992). These fights within the Kautilyan system are a big problem.

In modern cognitive warfare, an attacker can hit these weak spots from a long way off. The Ari can make ethnic tensions worse, provoke riots, and make it hard for people to go around the corridor by employing algorithms to broadcast fake news, deepfakes, and propaganda on social media. The Indian government would have to send a number of army and paramilitary forces to the Phansidewa-Panitanki area (Kantakasodhana) to keep its own people safe. They would have a harder time keeping themselves safe from external attacks. The Ari uses IO to make Viji Gishu's own people an issue. This makes Bheda act in an atypical way and resolve the chokepoint without initiating a normal conflict.

6.3 Important Things You Should Do to Stay Safe Online

India needs to be "actively cyber defensive" and tough-minded in its approach to this new Tusnimyuddha. In the digital age, there needs to be the same level of redundancy we talked about earlier (Durga Vidhana). This means the military needs to set up robust, local intranets and communication nodes with quantum-encrypted links that can't be hacked, and a comprehensive plan to bring people from both sides of the border together that takes into account the complaints of long-term residents. This will deprive the enemy of the political and social resources Bheda needs.

7. Kautilyan Wargaming: Setting Up Scenarios at the Choke Point

To thoroughly assess the effectiveness of the Mandala framework, it is imperative to utilize Kautilyan principles to analyse potential challenges concerning the Siliguri Corridor. Kautilya didn't think of war (Vigraha) as a fixed thing; instead, he saw it as a series of moving and non-moving exchanges shaped by the relative strength of the Viji Gishu (India) and the Ari (China). The following scenarios look at how the structural arrangements of the Madhyama (Bhutan/Nepal) and Mitra (Bangladesh) affect the resolution of regional crises.

7.1 Scenario 1: The "Salami Slice" in the Grey Zone (Doklam 2.0)

The Threat Vector: The Ari slowly begins to take over land in the Madhyama (Bhutan), with the Jampheri Ridge as the main target. The purpose is to gain a good tactical picture of the Siliguri Corridor without beginning a full-blown battle. When China cuts off diplomatic connections with Thimphu and sends money (Dana) to settle the border on Beijing's terms, it is "sowing discord." **The Kautilyan Response:** India's principal purpose is Samsraya, which means forming alliances to safeguard one another. India should send some of the Tri Shakti Corps to physically stop the Ari's advance, much as it did under the 2007 Indo-Bhutan Treaty. This is like what happened during the 2017 Doklam standoff. On the other side, the Mandala hypothesis suggests that Danda (power) isn't enough if the Madhyama (the middle) is weak. India could help Thimphu remain strong by providing both significant economic guarantees and diplomatic support. This would keep Ari from attacking the buffer state.

7.2 Scenario 2: Information Operations (Kantakasodhana) that make it hard to breathe within

The Threat Vector: The Ari go to Tusnimyuddha (Silent War) because they know it's safe there. The enemy uses state-sponsored proxy networks and cyber operators (Gudhapurusha) to make the already unstable political and ethnic situations in the Darjeeling and Dooars areas even worse. The social upheaval, extended strikes, and blockades that followed shut down the crucial NH-31 and rail networks, making it impossible to travel to the corridor from the inside.

Kautilya's Answer: Kautilya believed that getting rid of internal thorns (kantakasodhana) was more essential than keeping out attacks from outside. He said that an internal rebellion is usually worse than an external attack (Gautam, 2013). India's response should make it obvious that it is protecting its own people and showing off its military strength to other countries. The state must immediately employ Sama (conciliation) to address the economic and social issues faced by individuals residing along the border. It also needs to employ advanced intelligence to gradually dismantle the enemy's financial and digital proxy networks (Danda did this in the US).

7.3 Scenario 3: The Kinetic Severing and the War in Many Areas

The Threat Vector: The PLA assaults quickly and in a typical way from the Chumbi Valley. They try to blind the Indian C4ISR nodes in the Eastern Command with a lot of cyberattacks and artillery. The goal is to acquire control of the terrain around Phansidewa and Panitanki.

The Kautilyan Response: The Viji Gishu can live only in a state of extreme Vighraha (war) if the Mitra remains loyal and the infrastructure already built (Durga Vidhana) is not needed. India needs to exercise the transit rights it agreed to with Bangladesh immediately, before the corridor is further attacked. The Mitra is the major road for moving things. The Chattogram port and the Akhaura-Agartala train link help India keep its military in the northeast well supplied. India's Brahmastra Strike Corps is also conducting Yana, which means invading across the Tibetan Plateau to force the Ari to fight on multiple fronts. This helps maintain the choke point open.

8. Raja Mandala Directives for the 21st Century: Ideas for Strategic Policy

Translating ancient classical realism into today's strategic doctrine is a valuable concept, as it will help India's national security personnel understand their directives. To make sure the Siliguri Corridor is safe for good, New Delhi needs to execute the following Kautilyan things:

The Madhyama Buffer (Economic Anchoring) should always be open to the government. The Ministry of External Affairs needs to do more than pursue transactional diplomacy; it needs to work to deepen the economic ties between Bhutan and Nepal. Cross-border digital payment systems (like UPI), linking regional power grids, and helping Thimphu and Kathmandu pay off their large government debt, will make it harder for China (Ari) to get involved in other nations' business.

Make the Mitra a Main Artery: The Siliguri Corridor shouldn't be the only route to the Northeast anymore. India wants to make it easier for people and things to cross the land and water borders between India and Bangladesh. Extending the Ashu Ganj inland port and developing long-term, unbreakable transit arrangements with Dhaka will permanently fix the geographic weakness of the Chicken's Neck.

The Ministry of Defence needs to ensure that key supplies are secure within the 22-kilometre corridor before it can strengthen the Durga Vidhana (Subterranean and Cyber Fortification). Overhead kinetic strikes and precision-guided bombs (PGMs) shouldn't be able to damage oil pipelines, fibre optic cables, or ammo stockpiles. To keep Ari from using his electronic warfare skills against them, the Eastern Command also requires a localized, quantum-encrypted internet.

India needs to stop largely defending itself online and start doing something. Asana (standing in a threatening way) is a new approach to building offensive cyber-deterrence capabilities focused on the PLA's logistical facilities in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The prospects of a violent attack on the Siliguri Corridor go down knowing that its supply lines might be cut off without anyone noticing.

9. Conclusion

The Siliguri Corridor is an example of a strategic vulnerability that cannot be compensated by military technology. The study employs Kautilya's Mandala theory that distinguishes between hostile entities and possible allies. The insecurity of the corridor is not only a geographical problem but also influenced by neighbouring countries. "Security is not only the presence of military but also the strategic use of diplomatic measures." The findings imply that Bhutan and Nepal are economically dependent on India; Bangladesh may not be as advantageous in circumventing the corridor, and China is prepared for a multi-domain war. Ultimately, re-evaluating the Corridor, drawing on conventional Indian strategic paradigms, could give useful lessons to enhance India's geopolitical salience in the Indo-Pacific region. It underscores the use of long-lasting concepts of Artha Shastra, not Western military techniques.

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