

Original Research Article

Heavy Mineral composition and sources of Himalayan Neogene Sediments occurring along the Garu-Likabali road section, Arunachal Pradesh, India.

ABSTRACT

The Neogene sedimentary sequence of the Arunachal Himalayas is represented by the Dafla, Subansiri and Kimin Formations. Their systematic heavy mineral analysis along the Garu-Likabali Road section indicates that the heavy mineral assemblage is composed of sixteen heavy mineral varieties comprising of andalusite, biotite, chloritoid, chlorite, epidote, garnet (pink, garnet (colourless), hornblende, hypersthene, kyanite, muscovite, rutile, sphene, staurolite, tourmaline and zircon, besides opaque minerals. The assemblage points towards a complex sediment provenance for the Neogene sedimentary sequences with sediment inputs from pre-existing igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rocks. The boundary between the Dafla and Subansiri Formation in the region can be demarcated on the basis of disappearance of Hypersthene in the heavy mineral suite of the older Dafla Formation as well as appearance and persistence of -staurolite in the same Formation.

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Keywords: Heavy Mineral Analysis; Neogene sediments; Arunachal Himalaya.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Neogene sedimentary deposits of the Himalayan Foreland basin of North East India are represented by the Siwalik Group (Acharyya et. al., 1983; Nandy, 1983; GSI, 1989; GSI, 2010), and occurs along a narrow linear belt on the southern periphery of the Arunachal Himalayas. Its northern and southern limits are demarcated by the Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) and the Foot Hill Fault (GSI, 2010) (Fig.1). In the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh, these sedimentary sequences have been classified as the Dafla Formation, Subansiri Formation and the Kimin Formation; making them correlatable with the Lower, Middle and Upper Siwalik Formations of the Western Himalayan Sequence of India. Pre-Tertiary sequences override these Formations along northerly dipping, NNE-SSW trending low-angle overthrusts. Lately, fresh exposures of the Neogene sedimentary deposits have appeared along the Garu-Likabali road, primarily due to road widening activities being undertaken in the region. This has provided an opportunity to further explore the lithology of the Neogene sedimentary sequences occurring in the area. The present study gives an account of the heavy mineral varieties and assemblages found in these sedimentary sequences.

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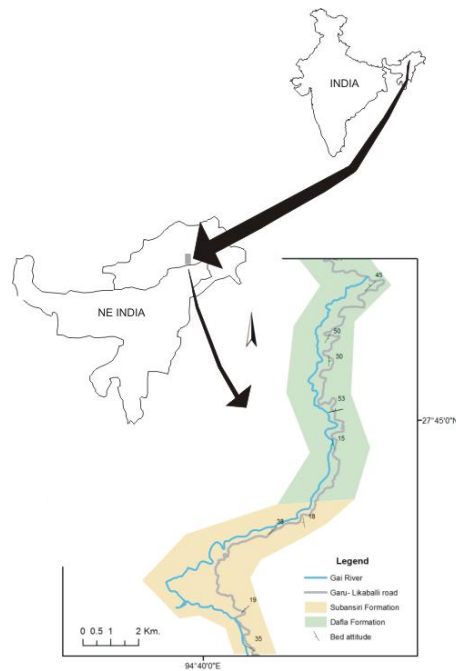


Fig.1 -Location map of the study area

2. METHODOLOGY

Twenty-two ~~numbers of~~ representative sandstone samples were selected from various locations covering the entire length of occurrence of the Neogene Sedimentary Sequence along the Garu-Likabali road section. The samples were selected in a manner that the samples would take into consideration all lithological variations occurring in the area. The samples were disintegrated by rubber mortar and pestle, and sieved through ASTM sieve No. 230. Sediments passing through the sieve were subjected to heavy mineral separation following the gravity separation method of Carver, 1971. Bromoform (specific gravity = 2.89) was used as the heavy liquid. The heavy minerals collected are then washed with ethyl alcohol to remove bromoform from their surfaces. The iron coating is removed from the samples by boiling them in 1:1 HCl (Hydrochloric acid) with aluminium metal as catalyst, for a short period of time. The heavy minerals thus separated are mounted on glass slides using a cold-mounting epoxy. The optical characteristics as well as quantitative analysis of the various heavy mineral varieties were examined with a petrological polarizing microscope (Leica DM2700P) fitted with a mechanical stage. Standard literature on heavy mineral petrography (Mange and Wright, 2007; Milner, 1962; Lindholm, 1987), were consulted for proper identification of the heavy minerals. Quantitative petrographic data of heavy mineral varieties was subsequently used for the preparation of heavy mineral range table following the method of Evans, Hayman and Majeed, 1933.

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3. OBSERVATIONS

The non-opaque heavy mineral assemblage in the sedimentary sequence occurring along the Garu-Likabali section is composed of sixteen heavy mineral varieties. They are andalusite, biotite, chloritoid, chlorite, epidote, garnet (pink), garnet (colourless), hornblende, hypersthene, kyanite,

muscovite, rutile, sphene, staurolite, tourmaline and zircon. Their salient characteristics are as follows

Andalusite - The grains are colourless and rounded to sub-rounded in shape (Fig. 2.1). They are weakly pleochroic from colourless to pale pink, with moderately high relief and shows first order grey interference colour. They comprise about 0.65 to 7.86 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

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BIOTITE - Biotite occur as brownish subangular to subrounded grains (-Fig. 2.2). Some of the grains show isotropic behaviour. Minute biotite flakes are also found as inclusions in colorless garnet. They constitute about 0.50 to 11.11 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

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CHLORITE - Chlorite occurs as green to dirty yellowish green minerals with a low relief and a micaceous habit (Fig. 2.3). They have anomalous grey interference colour and low birefringence. They comprise between 0.36 to 0.65 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

EPIDOTE - Epidote exhibits typical lemon yellow to pistachio green colour, together with strong birefringence and high interference colours (-Fig. 2.4, 2.5). Grains are equidimensional, angular to sub-rounded, anhedral and weakly pleochroic. Inclusions of zircon are commonly observed. It constitutes about 2.18 to 34.09 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

GARNET - Garnets are mostly colourless with only few grains showing pink (Fig. 2.12), brown and yellowish brown colour (-Fig. 2.11-). They are the most abundant constituent of the heavy mineral assemblages. Both angular (Fig. 2.7) and sub-rounded to rounded varieties (Fig. 2.6) are common. Elongated colourless garnet grains are also observed. Minute inclusions of long euhedral zircons and biotite flakes are observed within the colourless garnet grains (Fig. 2.9, 2.10). The isotropic nature and high relief characterize all garnet grains. Knee shaped geniculate twins (Fig. 2.14) has been observed in some of the garnets. It constitutes about 3.74 to 63.01 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

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HORNBLende - Hornblende exhibit a range of colours from bluish green, brownish green to brown and a sub-angular to prismatic shape (Fig. 2.15, 2.16, 2.17, 2.18). The greenish varieties are more dominant than the brown coloured variety. Both fresh as well as weathered grains are observed. The weathered grains are often transformed to chlorite. Hornblende constitutes about 6.45 to 44.57 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

HYPERSTHENE - Hypersthene occurs in shades of pink, green and greenish brown (-Fig. 2.19, 2.20, 2.21). The grains shows pleochroism from pale pink to yellowish green. Most of them are sub-angular in shape. They have parallel extinction, high relief and low to moderate birefringence. It constitutes about 0.25 to 2.18 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

KYANITE - Kyanite is colourless and has bladed to subrounded shapes (-Fig. 2.22). They are characterized by distinct cleavages and shows step-like areas of bright first and second-order interference colours. It has an inclined extinction and moderate to high relief (-Fig. 2.23). The extinction angle ranges between 28° and 30°. Some of the kyanite grains are partially weathered (Fig. 2.24), while some contain inclusions of opaque and non-opaque minerals. It constitutes about 0.54 to 0.93 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

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RUTILE - Rutile occur as amber coloured grains with very high relief (-Fig. 2.25, 2.26). Only few show blood red colour. They have angular to sub-angular shapes and exhibit extreme birefringence. Minute opaque inclusions and overgrowths are observed in some grains. Rutile constitutes about 1.56 to 1.62 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

Sphene (titanite) is colourless to pale yellow in colour, euhedral to anhedral in shape and shows weak pleochroism. The grains become bluish in colour at the point of maximum extinction (Fig. 2.27, 2.28). Both relief and birefringence are high. It constitutes about 0.33 to 4.87 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

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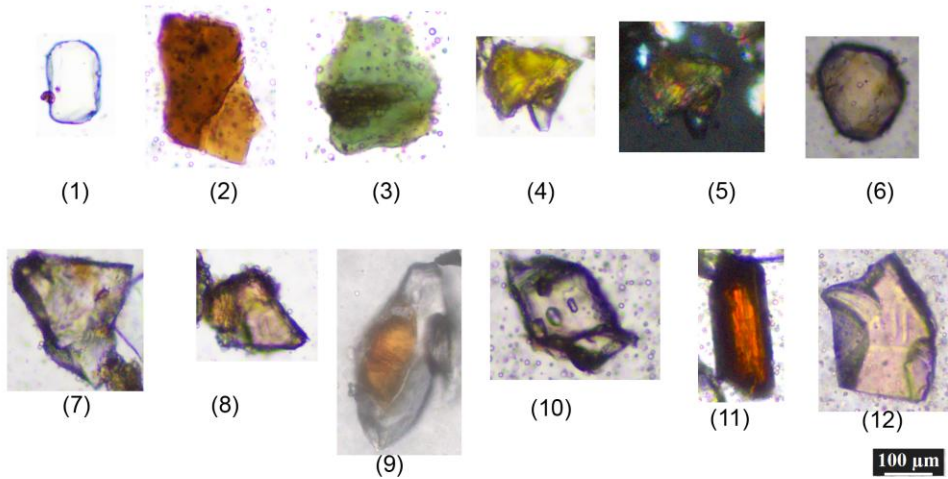
STAUROLITE: Yellowish brown to straw yellow varieties of staurolite are found. They have high relief, moderate birefringence and show strong pleochroism from pale yellow to golden yellow (Fig. 2.29, 2.30). The grains are mostly angular in shape. It forms about 0.59 to 3.04 % of the heavy mineral assemblage.

TOURMALINE: Tourmaline grains are light brown to dark yellowish brown in colour and show strong pleochroism. They range in shapes from elongated prismatic, euhedral to subhedral grains with moderate relief (-Fig. 2.31, 2.32, 2.33, 2.34). Parallel extinction and high birefringence are the other characteristic features observed in the mineral. It constitutes about 0.54 to 0.62 % of the total heavy mineral assemblage.

ZIRCON: Zircons are colourless to pale pink and have euhedral to subrounded shapes (Fig. 2.40). Occasionally they occur as broken grains (-Fig. 2.38). Overgrowths are commonly found -in them (Fig. 2.39). They have a high relief and parallel extinction. Few grains exhibit zoning. Inclusions wherever present are usually of zircons and opaque minerals. Zircons form 0.53 to 7.69 percent of the total heavy mineral composition.

OPAQUES: The opaque minerals are irregular to sub-angular in shape; and brown to dark brown (almost black) in colour under polarized light and crossed nicols. They are identified as ilmenite, haematite and magnetites. They constitute about 4.1 to 49.7 % of the heavy mineral assemblage of the region.

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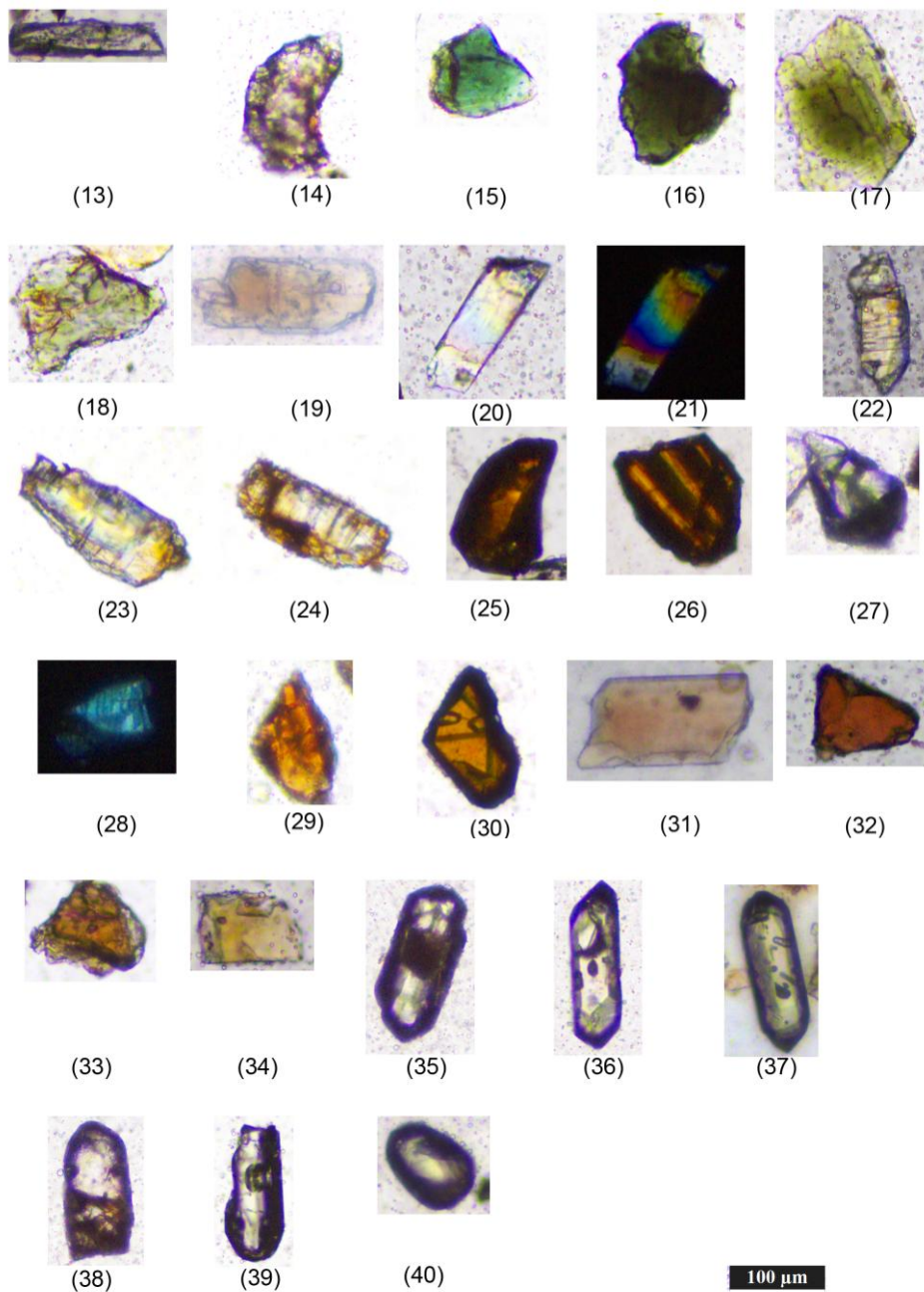


Fig.2 —Photomicrographs of heavy mineral varieties occurring in the Neogene Sedimentary Sequences of the Arunachal Himalayas. Refer to descriptions in text for details.

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3.1 Heavy Mineral Range Table

Quantitative petrographic data of the heavy mineral assemblage found at various locations along the Garu-Likabali Road were arranged systematically on the basis of their relative stratigraphic positions (Fig.3). The heavy mineral range table depicts a persistent occurrence of andalusite, biotite, epidote, garnet (both pink and colourless), hornblende, kyanite, rutile, sphene, tourmaline and zircon throughout the stratigraphic sequence of the studied area. Chloritoid, chlorite, hypersthene and muscovite do not show a persistent occurrence. Hypersthene appears and becomes persistent from sample 3.10 onwards, while at around the same stratigraphic location (Sample No. 16.3) there is reappearance of muscovite. The heavy mineral range table also indicates the disappearance of staurolite in the younger sediments (Sample No. 3.15 and younger). These changes indicate unroofing of new rocks and strata through erosion and drainage incision in the provenance.

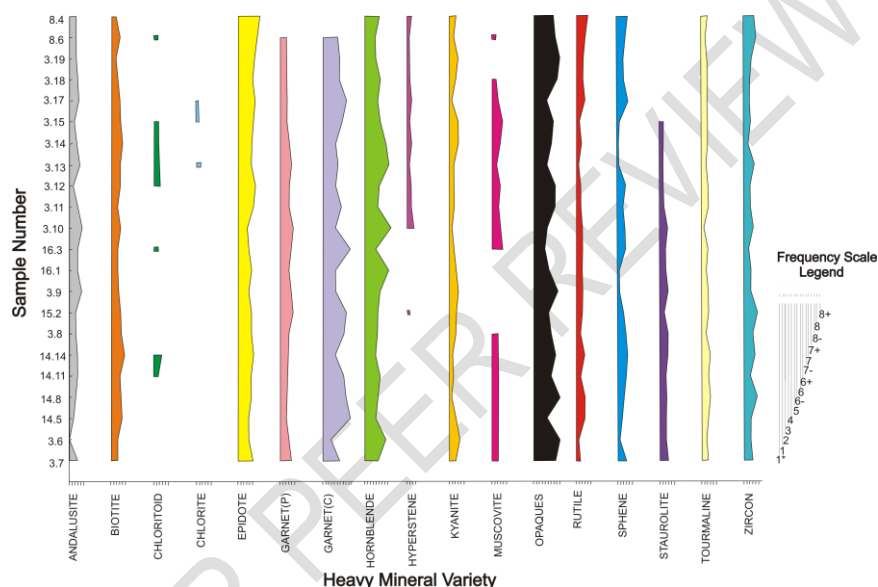


Fig.3 -Heavy Mineral Range % Table of Neogene Sedimentary Sequence occurring along the Garu – Likabali Section, Arunachal Pradesh.

4. INTERPRETATIONS Discussion

The consistent appearance of andalusite in the sediments probably indicates towards supply of sediments through erosion of pre-existing argillaceous rocks of contact aureoles around igneous intrusions (Deer et al., 1985). Similarly, the consistent occurrence of epidote also indicates towards supply of sediments from regionally metamorphosed rocks of epidote-amphibolite facies. They also indicate the derivation of sediments of the Neogene Formations of the present study area from basic igneous sources, due to readjustments associated with dynamic metamorphism. The presence of varied types of garnets and hornblende is indicative of a metamorphic paragenesis, although hornblendes are also characteristic constituents of intermediate plutonic rocks. The consistent occurrence of Hypersthene towards the later part of the sequence indicates the derivation of a portion of the sediments through erosion of ultrabasic rocks and basalt (Deer et al., 1985). The occurrence of kyanite and staurolite also reflect the derivation of the Neogene sediments from rocks which had undergone regional metamorphism of pelitic rocks. Rutile and sphene are titanium-bearing minerals and are constituents of plutonic igneous rocks and also of metamorphic rocks such as gneisses and schists. Zircon, tourmaline and rutile are highly resistant to weathering and so their presence

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suggests helps in understanding the maturity of the sediments (references?). The presence of euhedral long slender zircon crystals in some of the sediments points towards their igneous derivation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Petrographic examination of the heavy mineral suite of the Neogene Formations occurring along the Garu-Likabali road indicates that a nearly consistent heavy mineral assemblage comprising of sixteen heavy mineral varieties occurs all through-out the sedimentary sequence. The heavy mineral assemblages of various locations also suggest that the source of supply of sediments is complex, and indicates towards a mix of igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary provenance. A significant change in the heavy mineral suite is observed beyond sample number 3.10, which is marked by the disappearance of Hypersthene and persistence of -staurolite. Also, the field location of this change is almost close to the point of contact of the older Dafla Formation and the younger Subansiri Formation. This probably leads to the conclusion that the heavy mineral assemblage of Hence the Dafla Formation along the Garu-Likabali road section is characterized by the absence of Hypersthene, and but the mineral its persistent occurrence in the younger Subansiri Formation.

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