

**OPTICALLY STIMULATED LUMINESCENCE DATING
OF FLUVIAL SEDIMENTS: APPLICATIONS AND
IMPLICATIONS TO PALEOSEISMOLOGY
AND PALEOCLIMATOLOGY**

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the contents of this thesis comprise original research work of the candidate and have at no time been submitted for any other degree.

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Abstract

The dynamic Himalaya is the result of collision of the Indian and the Asian plate. The signatures of climatic and tectonic events during its evolution are preserved in the form of various geomorphic features. This thesis deals with the methodological aspects of luminescence dating of fluvial sediments in the Himalaya. The results are then used to understand some aspects of the past climate and seismic events in Himalaya.

Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating relies on the premise that daylight exposure of the constituent minerals during their pre-depositional transport photo-bleaches the geological signal to a zero or near zero level. In case of fluvial sediments, the daylight is attenuated due to variety of factors such as depth of water column and turbidity. This implies that the fluvial sediments are in general partially and heterogeneously bleached at the time of their deposition. Luminescence dating methods such as the Single Aliquot Regeneration (SAR) method now enable an understanding of the bleaching history of a sample and help in the isolation of the most bleached grains for age estimation.

The present study examined the feasibility of using OSL dating for a variety of fluvial environments from Himalayan terrain. The basic effort was towards examining the validity of the basic assumptions of luminescence dating technique using samples with age constraints. In this process new protocols were developed, tested and applied. The aim and scope of the thesis can be summarized in two broad categories–

1. Methodological aspects

Sensitivity changes during the measurement of natural OSL is not accounted for, in conventional SAR protocol. Such a change could imply systematic offsets in SAR ages. This aspect was examined for a large variety of sediments using 110°C TL peak as a surrogate for OSL sensitivity. Results indicated that sensitivity changes could range from 20-50% and therefore corresponding offsets in ages could occur.

A practical handicap in applying SAR protocol is that it consumes considerable measurement time. This implies a low data throughput. Recently, a practical solution towards increasing the data throughput was suggested. This involved construction of a Standard Growth Curve (SGC) from a small set of growth curves, on which sensitivity corrected natural luminescences from large number of aliquots are read to estimate the paleodose. This process minimizes time by eliminating the need of carrying out a full SAR cycle that comprises the construction of a growth curve for each aliquot. A detailed investigation suggested that reliable SGC-SAR based ages can be obtained for cases where regression coefficient of SGC is greater than 0.9.

2. Feasibility of sediment dating from Himalayan terrain, chronology and its Implications–

Breaching of a landslide induced natural lake is quite common in Himalayas and results in flash

floods. This provides high velocity, high bed load and high suspension load flows. A feasibility study for the dating of sediments transported under these conditions was examined using samples of a known catastrophic flood event in Himalaya. This was the 1970 flood in the Alaknanda basin. A suite of samples at various distances downstream from the origin of flood over a distance of ~250 km were collected. No systematic change in bleaching was found although mean grain size of the sample decreased as the distance of travel of the sediment. However samples deposited during receding phase of flood has indicated significant bleaching up to 90% and gave a notional luminescence age of ~ 400 a, indicating the magnitude of 'zero error' in luminescence dating of such sediments.

The extent of daylight bleaching for the slack water deposit in Raiwala near Haridwar was also examined. The difference between mean and least 10% of paleodoses suggested that samples were partially bleached and the SAR protocol could still provide realistic ages. Almost 1.5 meter of sediment was deposited in a time period of ~2.3ka to ~800 years having 14 flood couplets in total. The results accorded well with paleoclimate records.

Fan sediments comprise gravel and coarse-grained sands. Typical transport distance in the case of Himalaya fans sediments is of the order of few km and the bleaching in such sediments is expected to be partial. It has been suggested that mega fan aggradation in Ganga plain occurred during the time of the initiation of humid climate that was preceded by a long arid phase when huge amount of sediment from the Himalaya were transported into the Ganga plain. The data suggested that the mega fan sediments are relatively better bleached as compared to piedmont fan sediments. Our results concluded that the studied section of the mega fan sedimentation postdate the Last Glacial Maximum and occurred in three episodes during ~14 – 8 ka. This accorded well with the paleoclimate records. The possible cause of well-bleached mega-fan sediment is explained by the prolonged daylight exposure during weathering in arid period. Chronology of the younger piedmont fan suggests its formation during ~2 – 1 ka.

During tectonic uplift of the riverbed, the river incises into the bedrock and leaves a thin veneer (~1-2 meter) of sediments on incised bedrock. Samples from such strath terraces in Tista valley were taken for feasibility of luminescence dating with respect to bleaching. A poor bleaching indicated by wide dose distribution. However, minimum 10% SAR ages provided a stratigraphically consist inverted age sequences. The luminescence ages suggest that the Darjeeling-Sikkim-Tibet wedge is going through a cycle of various phases of mountain building processes. There were two deformation fronts active between 20–5 ka; one near the Main Boundary Thrust and the other on south of the mountain front. The results suggested that the region close to the Main boundary thrust in Tista valley is neo-tectonically active and out of sequence thrusting occurred due to various phases of mountain building processes. Luminescence SAR ages have indicated a varying incision rates of 3–10 mm/year by river Tista in the studied section.

Overall the present thesis established that reliable ages using Luminescence Dating could be estimated for sediments from wide range of depositional environment. Radiocarbon dating has limited applicability in the region on account of contamination and hence reliable chronology of these sediments was not possible till this work. The present thesis examined the bleaching aspects of luminescence dating and the implication of SAR analysis in sediments from the Himalaya. This study therefore provides a basis for the application of Luminescence Dating and concludes that it can play a significant role in studies related to paleoclimate and tectonic in the Himalayan region.

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Thesis contents

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgement	vi
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xiii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1-36
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Brief description of existing dating method for quaternary sediments.....	4
1.3 Luminescence Dating- Basic Principle.....	10
1.4 Age Equation.....	12
1.5 Optical bleaching of sediment.....	14
1.6 Luminescence dating techniques.....	17
1.7 Estimation of bleaching using SAR.....	19
1.8 Estimating Paleodose from a dose distribution.....	20
1.9 Luminescence dating and Himalaya.....	22
1.10 The objective and scope of the thesis.....	23
1.10.1 Methodological aspects.....	23
1.10.2 Feasibility of sediment dating from Himalayan terrain and implications.....	24
1.11 Chapter wise details.....	26
References.....	29
Chapter 2: Experimental Procedures	37-60
2.1 Sample preparation.....	37
2.1.1 Coarse Grain separation technique.....	38
2.1.2 Fine grain separation technique.....	38
2.2 TL/OSL measurement.....	39
2.3 Laboratory irradiation and calibration of the beta dose source.....	39
2.4 Estimation of Paleodose.....	44
2.4.1 Multiple aliquot methods.....	44
2.4.1.1 Multiple aliquot additive dose method.....	44
2.4.1.2 Multiple aliquot regeneration method.....	46
2.4.1.3 Partial Bleach Method and Linearly Modulated OSL.....	47
2.4.2 Single Aliquot Regeneration.....	48

2.4.3 Natural sensitivity corrected SAR	50
2.5 Annual Dose Measurement.....	54
References.....	58
 Chapter 3:Changes in natural OSL sensitivity of quartz: Implication to dating	61-69
3.1 Introduction.....	61
3.2 Experimental details and methods involved.....	62
3.3 Results and Discussions.....	65
References.....	69
 Chapter 4: Limits and applicability of Standardized Growth Curve	70-79
4.1 Introduction.....	70
4.2 Concept and Methodology.....	71
4.3 Standard Growth Curve.....	72
4.3.1 Construction of SGC.....	72
4.3.2 Minimum aliquots needed for SGC.....	72
4.3.3. Universal SGC for an entire stratigraphic sequence.....	75
4.4 Results and summary.....	75
References.....	79
 Chapter 5: Fluvial sediments in diverse depositional settings: Applicability of Luminescence dating	80-113
5.1 Flash flood deposit.....	82
5.1.1 Introduction.....	82
5.1.2 1970's Alaknanda Flood.....	82
5.1.3 Field stratigraphy and sampling details.....	83
5.1.4 Results and discussion.....	88
5.2 Low energy slack water deposit.....	93
5.2.1 Introduction	93
5.2.2 Field stratigraphy and sampling details.....	96
5.2.3 Results and discussion.....	96
5.3 High energy alluvial fan deposit.....	98
5.3.1 Introduction	98
5.3.2 Study area and climate.....	102
5.3.3 Field stratigraphy and sampling details.....	102
5.3.4 Results and discussion.....	103
5.4 Incised fluvial terraces.....	104
5.4.1 Introduction	104

5.4.2 Geomorphology, tectonic setting and sample location.....	106
5.4.3 Results and Discussion.....	107
References.....	111
 Chapter 6: Implications of Luminescence Chronology.....	114-133
6.1 Flash flood and Terrace sediment	114
6.2 Slack water deposit at Raiwala (Haridwar).....	118
6.3 Chronology of Yamuna-Ganga mega-fan and piedmont fan sedimentation.....	122
6.4 Neo-tectonic activity in Darjeeling Himalayan.....	127
References.....	131
 Chapter7: Conclusions and Future Outlook.....	134-137
7.1 Conclusions and Future Outlook.....	134
 List of Publications.....	138

Figures

Page

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The processes of luminescence production in an insulating solid.....	11
1.2 Spectrum of daylight intensity as a function of water depth and bleaching.....	16
efficiency with respect to stimulating light wavelength	

Chapter 2: Experimental Procedures

2.1 Schematic of the instrument used for TL/OSL measurement.....	40
2.2 Single Grain dose calibration and heterogeneity in dose rate.....	43
2.3 Multiple aliquot growth curve and paleodose estimation.....	45
2.4 Partial bleach growth curve and paleodose estimation.....	49
2.5 Single Aliquot Regeneration protocol.....	51
2.6 Single aliquot regeneration (SAR) growth curve and paleodose estimation.....	52
2.7 Detail of Natural sensitivity corrected SAR (NSC-SAR) protocol.....	53
2.8 NSC-SAR growth curve and paleodose estimation.....	55

Chapter 3: Natural Sensitivity Changes During OSL Measurement

3.1 Correlation of 110°C thermo-luminescence and OSL counts.....	64
3.2 Sensitivity changes due to preheat and OSL measurements.....	66
3.3 Comparison of dose distribution obtained by SAR and NSC-SAR paleodoses.....	68

Chapter 4: Limits and Applicability of Standard Growth Curve

4.1 Standard Growth Curves (SGC) from various samples in Himalaya.....	73
4.2 A comparison between the SAR paleodoses with SGC-SAR.....	74

Chapter 5: Fluvial sediments in diverse Depositional Settings

5.1 Location of 1970's flash flood deposits in Alaknanda Basin, Central Himalaya.....	85
5.2 Area of 1970's land slide and the sediment deposit at Srinagar.....	86
5.3 1970's flood deposit at Birehi and Grain size variation with distance.....	90
5.4 Paleodose distribution of the 1970's flash flood sediments.....	91
5.5 Location and stratigraphy of slack water deposit at Raiwala.....	95
5.6 Paleodose distribution of the sediments from Himalaya.....	99
5.7 Location and stratigraphy of sample of Yamuna Ganga mega and Piedmont fan.....	101
5.8 Location of uplifted fluvial terraces in the lower Tista valley.....	108
5.9 Location of samples collected in the raised surface south of mountain front.....	110

Chapter 6: Luminescence Chronology of Fluvial archives: Paleoclimatic and Paleoseismic Implications

6.1 SAR ages of sediments from terrace T ₁ at Srinagar, Central Himalaya.....	117
6.2 SAR ages slack water deposit at Raiwala, Haridwar.....	120
6.3 SAR ages of Yamuna Ganga mega and piedmont fan deposit.....	124
6.4 Correlation of paleoclimatic record and SAR ages of slack water and fan sediments.....	126
6.5 SAR ages of fluvial terraces and raised surfaces in Tista valley.....	129

Tables

Page

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Age range and material used in various dating techniques for quaternary material.....5

Chapter 2: Experimental Procedures

2.1 Source dose rate distribution in a single grain disk.....42

2.2 Calculation of dose rate from known concentrations of radioactive elements.....57

Chapter 3: Natural Sensitivity Changes During OSL Measurement

3.1 Effect of natural sensitivity correction on paleodoses.....67

Chapter 4: Limits and Applicability of Standard Growth Curve

4.1 Variation in mean paleodose computed by varying no. of aliquots.....77

4.2 Comparison of average of least 10% and total paleodoses obtained from SAR growth curve and SGC.....78

Chapter 5: Fluvial sediments in diverse Depositional Settings

5.1 SAR paleodose for 1970's flood sediment and terrace T₁ at Srinagar.....89

5.2 Partial bleach and SAR paleodoses for slack water deposit at Raiwala, Haridwar.....97

5.3 SAR paleodoses for Yamuna Ganga mega and piedmont fan sediments.....105

5.4 SAR paleodoses for fluvial terraces in Tista valley.....109

Chapter 6: Luminescence Chronology of Fluvial archives and their Implications

6.1 SAR ages for 1970's flood sediment and terrace T₁ at Srinagar.....116

6.2 Source of sediment from terrace T₁ at Srinagar121

6.3 SAR ages for slack water deposit at Raiwala, Haridwar.....121

6.4 SAR ages for Yamuna Ganga mega and piedmont fan sediments.....123

6.5 SAR ages for fluvial terraces in Tista valley.....128