Shortwave Radiative Impacts of the Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer (ATAL) using Balloon-borne In-situ measurements at three distinct locations in India

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the direct shortwave radiative forcing and heating rates of the Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer (ATAL) in the Upper Troposphere Lower Stratosphere (UTLS) region using in-situ observations from the Balloon measurement campaigns of the Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer (BATAL) conducted between 2014 and 2018. Measurements were obtained over three distinct locations in India: Gadanki (13.48°N, 79.18°E), Hyderabad (17.47°N, 78.58°E), and Varanasi (25.27°N, 82.99°E). Given the ambiguity in the chemical composition of ATAL from several reported studies, seven different aerosol mixtures—comprising sulfate, nitrate, organic carbon, and ammonium—were considered to assess their impact on estimates of ATAL radiative forcing and heating rates. A pronounced enhancement in aerosol backscatter was observed at ATAL altitudes (13 to 19 km) across all locations, with the backscatter ratio (at 455 nm) peaking at 1.07 over Varanasi and Hyderabad, followed by 1.06 over Gadanki. Radiative

forcing estimates indicate a net warming effect, with ATAL contributing up to 3% of the total columnar atmospheric forcing. Heating rates reveal a marked increase in aerosol-induced warming at ATAL altitudes, with maximum heating rates reaching 0.03 K day^{-1} across the study locations. The radiative impact of ATAL aerosols is highly sensitive to variations in the aerosol composition. Compared to a reference case with a stratospheric sulfate background, the ATAL radiative forcing varies between 0.03 and 0.28 W m^{-2} (1.5 to 14-fold increase). At the same time, heating rates exhibit a 30-fold increase, reaching 0.03 K day^{-1}, depending on the aerosol mixture. Despite these strong localized effects within the UTLS, the overall contribution to total columnar aerosol forcing remains moderate (up to 5%), underscoring the importance of aerosol composition in determining ATAL's radiative influence.

Keywords: *Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer; Aerosol-Radiation Interaction; Radiative forcing and heating rates; Upper Troposphere-Lower Stratosphere*

1. Introduction

The Asian summer monsoon, which occurs from June to August, plays a crucial role in transporting pollutant-laden air masses across a vast geographic region in the Northern Hemisphere (e.g., Vogel et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2017). A large-scale anti-cyclonic circulation, known as the Asian Summer Monsoon Anticyclone (ASMA), develops in the Upper Troposphere Lower Stratosphere (UTLS) due to intense heating over the Tibetan Plateau, coupled with deep convection over the head Bay of Bengal (BoB). This system effectively traps and redistributes air masses within a broad region (10°N–40°N, 10°E–140°E) (von Hobe et al., 2021; Lelieveld et al., 2018; Park et al., 2007; Randel and Park, 2006), leading to significant enhancements in trace constituents such as water vapor, methane, nitrogen dioxide, ozone around the ASMA center (Basha et al., 2021; Kumar and Ratnam, 2021; Park et al., 2007). Satellite observations have

49   identified a persistent aerosol enhancement in the UTLS (~ 13–18 km) during the monsoon, known

50   as the Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer (ATAL) (Vernier et al., 2011, 2015; Thomason and

51   Vernier, 2013). The ATAL is of particular scientific interest due to its potential influence on

52   stratospheric composition, chemistry, cirrus cloud properties, and the Earth's radiative balance.

53   The formation and dissipation of ATAL are closely linked to deep convection, which transports

54   aerosols from the BoB and surrounding land areas into the UTLS (He et al., 2020). However,

55   ATAL aerosols exhibit significant spatial and temporal variability, reflecting their diverse sources

56   and transport pathways (Fairlie et al., 2020; Lau et al., 2018; Neely et al., 2014; Fadnavis et al.,

57   2013). The presence of both natural and anthropogenic aerosols within ATAL, combined with

58   dynamic and chemical interactions—including secondary aerosol formation—further complicates

59   its characterization. Recent studies indicate that a substantial fraction of ATAL aerosols results

60   from gas-to-particle conversion of inorganic and organic precursors, highlighting the role of

61   secondary aerosol formation in this region (Appel et al., 2022).

62   Despite growing interest in ATAL, its optical and radiative properties remain poorly

63   constrained due to limitations in observational datasets. Aerosol optical depth (AOD) and

64   extinction coefficient measurements in the UTLS are hindered by low aerosol concentrations,

65   instrumental detection thresholds, and retrieval uncertainties in satellite and lidar observations.

66   Additionally, complex transport and mixing processes in the UTLS make it challenging to

67   determine ATAL's chemical composition, which is critical for quantifying its optical properties—

68   such as single scattering albedo (SSA) and asymmetry parameter (ASY)—that govern radiative

69   transfer calculations. Early studies primarily identified sulfate as the dominant component of

70   ATAL (e.g., Vernier et al., 2015; Yu et al., 2015; Fadnavis et al., 2013). However, subsequent

71   investigations revealed a more diverse aerosol composition. A reanalysis study for the summer of

72 2008 detected significant contributions from mineral dust and carbonaceous aerosols transported

73 by deep convection (Lau et al., 2018). Long-term simulations (2000–2015) using the Community

74 Earth System Model further indicated that ATAL aerosols comprise approximately 40% sulfate,

75 30% secondary aerosols, 15% primary aerosols, 14% ammonia-based aerosols, and trace amounts

76 of black carbon (Bossolasco et al., 2021). Additionally, combined satellite, high-altitude aircraft,

77 and cloud-chamber studies suggested the dominance of ammonium nitrate particles in the upper

78 troposphere (Höpfner et al., 2019). Several in situ studies have also reported a substantial nitrate

79 fraction in ATAL (e.g., Vernier et al., 2022; Vernier et al., 2018), with aircraft-based chemical

80 analyses indicating significant contributions from particulate nitrate, ammonium, and organic

81 aerosols at 13–18 km (Appel et al., 2022).

82   Understanding the radiative impacts of ATAL remains a major research challenge due to the

83 uncertainties in aerosol composition, optical properties, and vertical distribution. Limited studies

84 have quantified its radiative effects. Vernier et al. (2015) reported an increase in summertime AOD

85 over Asia associated with ATAL from 0.002 to 0.006 between 1995 and 2013, leading to a regional

86 shortwave radiative forcing of -0.12 W m^{-2} at the top of the atmosphere (TOA). This forcing

87 partially offset (~33%) the radiative impact of global CO_2 increases during 2000–2010 (Solomon

88 et al., 2011). Using MERRA-2 reanalysis, Gao et al. (2023) estimated that ATAL aerosols exert a

89 clear-sky positive radiative forcing of 0.15 W m^{-2} at 20 km due to their absorption properties.

90 Chemistry-climate modeling by Fadnavis et al. (2022) further demonstrated that carbonaceous

91 aerosols induce tropospheric and lower stratospheric heating of 0.02–0.3 K per month, thereby

92 enhancing water vapor transport into the UTLS. Similarly, Chavan et al. (2021) showed that

93 biomass-burning aerosols over Asia contribute to UTLS heating rates of 0.001–0.02 K day^{-1}.

Despite these insights, significant gaps remain in our understanding of ATAL's radiative effects. The contribution of ATAL aerosols to total atmospheric forcing is largely unknown, and real-time, high-resolution, altitudinal in-situ observations remain scarce. Moreover, previous estimates rely predominantly on reanalysis or model-based studies, which introduce uncertainties due to several assumptions. Therefore, there is a need for direct observational constraints on ATAL radiative forcing and heating rates.

To address these gaps, the Balloon measurement campaigns for the Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer (BATAL) provide high-resolution in-situ measurements of aerosol and atmospheric properties, offering a unique opportunity to refine radiative transfer calculations for ATAL. This study leverages BATAL observations to (i) characterize ATAL enhancements across multiple BATAL study locations, (ii) quantify ATAL radiative forcing and heating rates within the UTLS (12-20 km) using the high-resolution in-situ measurements, (iii) assess the contribution of ATAL to total atmospheric column forcing, (iv) ascertain the sensitivity of ATAL radiative forcing and heating rates to variations in aerosol compositions, and (v) compare the heating rate estimates from in-situ measurements from the three-point locations with spatially averaged estimated derived from satellite observations to ascertain their regional representativeness and variability. To achieve these objectives, we introduce a methodological framework that integrates in-situ data to screen clouds, identify potential aerosol types or compositions, and incorporate these observations into radiative transfer calculations.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief description of the BATAL and study locations, Section 3 details the datasets used, and Section 4 outlines the methodology for estimating radiative impacts. The results are discussed in Section 5, followed by a summary of key findings in Section 6.

2. Campaign Details and Observation Sites

The BATAL campaigns were conducted jointly by the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) during the late monsoon season (July –September) from 2014 to 2018. These campaigns deployed high-altitude balloons equipped with miniature payloads to investigate the optical properties, size distribution, and composition of aerosols in the ATAL. Additionally, the campaigns focused on examining the behavior of ozone and water vapor in the UTLS and assessing the role of deep convection in transporting aerosols and trace gases to this region. For detailed descriptions of the payloads, balloon specifications, and other scientific objectives, refer to Vernier et al. (2018).

The BATAL campaigns were conducted at three distinct sites in India, chosen based on their local weather, emission characteristics, and recovery of payload (**Fig. 1**):

(i) **Gadanki (13.48°N, 79.18°E)** – A rural background location in southern peninsular India with hilly topography. Aerosol sources in this region are primarily from vehicular emissions, agricultural activities, and wood burning. During the monsoon season, the site experiences surface pressures between 960 and 965 hPa, temperatures ranging from 27°C to 30°C, and prevailing southwesterly winds of 1.5 to 1.6 m s^{-1}. The relative humidity is typically below 60%. Sky radiometer observations from this location revealed the presence of dominant coarse-mode aerosols during the monsoon (Santhosh et al., 2024a; Madhavan et al., 2021).

(ii) **Hyderabad (17.47°N, 78.58°E)** – A rapidly urbanizing megacity situated on the Deccan Plateau. This region has a semi-arid climate characterized by significant seasonal variations in temperature and humidity. Anthropogenic sources primarily drive local emissions, whereas long-range aerosol transport is more prevalent during the monsoon

140   season. AOD measurements indicate that coarse-mode aerosols contribute significantly

141   to the overall aerosol burden (Ratnam et al., 2020; Sinha et al., 2013).

142   (iii) **Varanasi (25.27°N, 82.99°E)** – An urban site in the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP)

143   characterized by a humid subtropical climate with pronounced seasonal variations in

144   temperature and rainfall. The region experiences high aerosol loading due to a mix of

145   natural and anthropogenic sources. Coarse-mode aerosols, primarily dust, dominate in

146   the pre-monsoon months, while fine-mode anthropogenic aerosols, including

147   carbonaceous and sulfate aerosols, are more prominent during the post-monsoon and

148   winter months (Murari et al., 2017; Tiwari and Singh, 2013).

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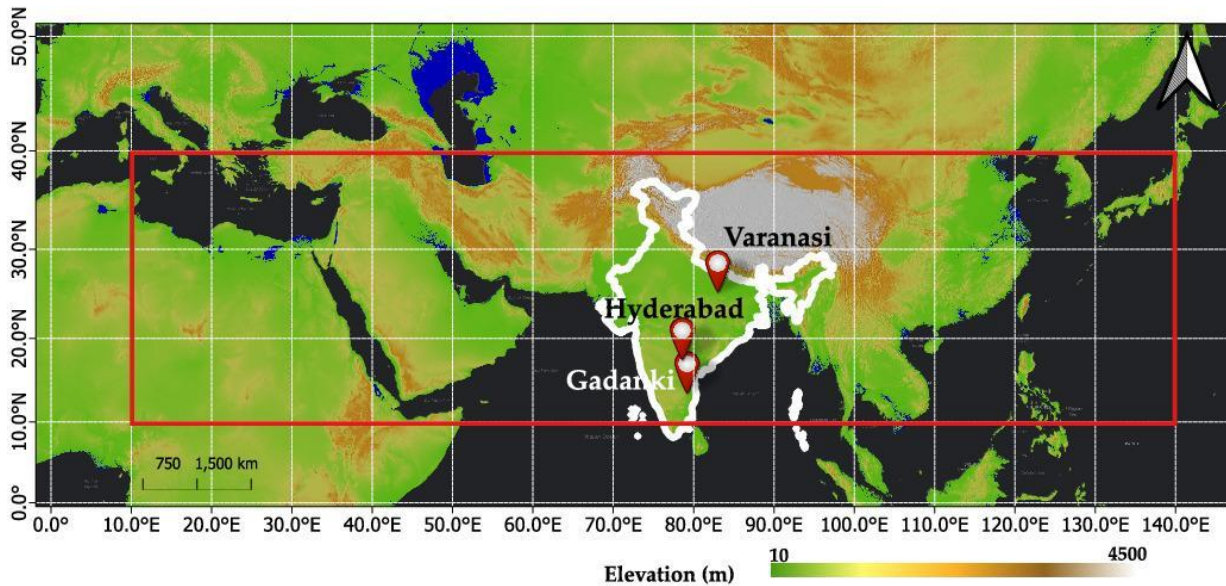
150   **Figure 1:** Balloon launch sites during the 2014-2018 BATAL campaigns. The red box outlines
151   the typical geographic extent of the Asian Tropopause Aerosol Layer (ATAL) region, spanning
152   10°E–140°E and 10°N–40°N.

153   These strategically selected sites offer critical insights into the spatial variability of aerosols

154   that influence the ATAL, enabling a comprehensive assessment of their chemical composition,

155   transport pathways, and radiative impacts in the UTLS.

3. Datasets

Among the multiple payloads launched during the BATAL campaigns, this study focuses on measurements from radiosondes and ozonesondes (for atmospheric parameters) and the Compact Optical Backscatter Aerosol Detector (COBALD) (for aerosol measurements).

3.1. Radiosonde and Ozonesonde

We utilized pressure, temperature, and relative humidity (RH) data from radiosondes, along with ozone volume mixing ratios from ozonesondes, to generate user-defined atmospheric profiles for the radiative forcing calculations. The Meisei (RS-11 G) and iMet radiosondes were used to measure temperature and pressure at different altitudes. The iMet radiosondes employed piezo-resistors for atmospheric pressure measurements, with an accuracy of 1–2 hPa. The Meisei radiosonde, which lacks a pressure sensor, derived pressure values from temperature and GPS altitude data. Ozone mixing ratios were obtained using EN-SCI Electrochemical Concentration Cell (ECC) ozonesondes, following the methodology outlined by Komhyr et al. (1995). More details on these methodologies can be found in Ratnam et al. (2014) and Akhil Raj et al. (2015). The observed atmospheric parameter profiles in the UTLS region are shown in **Figure S1**.

3.2. Compact Optical Backscatter Aerosol Detector (COBALD)

COBALD, developed by ETH Zurich, is a lightweight, balloon-borne sonde designed to measure backscattered light from aerosols, molecules, and clouds (Vernier et al., 2018). It operates with two LED light sources emitting at 455 nm (blue) and 940 nm (red) wavelengths. The emitted light illuminates the surrounding air, and a silicon photodetector captures the backscattered signal from particles within a 0.5-meter range. Approximately 90% of the measured backscattering signal originates from within a 10-meter radius of the instrument. COBALD operates without requiring external airflow and transmits real-time backscatter data, alongside pressure and temperature

179   measurements, to the ground station at a frequency of 1 Hz. The instrument has an uncertainty of

180   5% and a precision better than 1% in the UTLS region (Vernier et al., 2015, 2018).

181   Details of the balloon launches from which the present study's measurements were obtained

182   are summarized in **Table 1**. We considered those balloon-borne in-situ measurements, which

183   covered a minimum altitude of 20 km above the surface, to capture the ATAL signal effectively.

184   **Table 1:** Summary of balloon launches during the BATAL campaigns, highlighting the
185   availability of Compact Optical Backscatter Aerosol Detector (COBALD), radiosonde, and
186   ozonesonde measurements. All measurements cover a minimum altitude of 20 km, with maximum
187   altitudes ranging from 25 to 35 km. The average maximum altitude is 29 km at Gadanki, 27 km at
188   Hyderabad, and 30 km at Varanasi. 'Y' indicates data availability for a specific payload, while 'N'
189   denotes non-availability. All launches were conducted during local nighttime (UTC +05:30).

Location	Date and Time (UTC) of launch	COBALD	Ozonesonde	Radiosonde
Gadanki **(13.48°N, 79.18°E)**	18-08-2014, 15:00	Y	N	Y
	19-08-2014, 15:30	Y	Y	Y
	07-09-2016, 19:50	Y	Y	Y
	09-09-2016, 15:00	Y	Y	Y
	31-07-2017, 18:00	Y	Y	Y
	01-08-2017, 18:00	Y	Y	Y
Hyderabad **(17.47°N, 78.58°E)**	01-08-2015, 17:00	Y	N	Y
	05-08-2015, 22:00	Y	Y	Y
	06-08-2015, 22:00	Y	Y	Y
	08-08-2015, 18:00	Y	N	Y
	09-08-2015, 22:00	Y	N	Y
	13-08-2015, 18:00	Y	Y	Y
	08-08-2018, 21:00	Y	Y	Y
	17-08-2018, 20:00	Y	Y	Y

	26-08-2018, 20:00	Y	Y	Y
	28-08-2018, 20:20	Y	Y	Y
Varanasi	22-08-2015, 18:00	Y	N	Y
(25.27°N, 82.99°E)	22-08-2015, 22:00	Y	N	Y
	04-08-2016, 23:00	Y	N	Y
	06-08-2016, 21:00	Y	Y	Y
	08-08-2016, 21:30	Y	Y	Y

190

3.3. Ancillary Datasets

192 In addition to in-situ measurements, we utilized the following ancillary datasets:

193 **(i) MERRA-2 Reanalysis:** We used the Modern-Era Retrospective analysis for Research and

194 Applications, Version 2 (MERRA-2), Hourly, Time-averaged, Single-Level, Assimilation,

195 Aerosol Diagnostics dataset (M2T1NXAER; $0.625° \times 0.5°$ resolution, V5.12.4) developed

196 by NASA's Global Modelling and Assimilation Office (GMAO) to retrieve AOD values

197 for the campaign period. These AOD values were used to normalize aerosol extinction

198 profiles, ensuring consistency between columnar aerosol loading and derived extinction

199 profiles (for example, Santhosh et al., 2024b). Since collocated nighttime AOD retrievals

200 from in-situ measurements were unavailable, MERRA-2 served as a reliable alternative.

201 Che et al. (2019) reported improved MERRA-2 AOD performance in the South Asian

202 region based on comparisons with AERONET observations. The dataset provides total

203 AOD at 550 nm and the Angstrom exponent (AE) for the 470-870 nm range. The AODs at

204 455 and 940 nm wavelengths were derived using the Angstrom power law (Angstrom,

205 1964):

$$AOD_{\lambda_0} = AOD_{550} \times \left(\frac{\lambda_0}{550}\right)^{-AE} \qquad (1)$$

where λ_0 represents the target wavelength. Given that our required wavelengths (455 nm and 940 nm) fall slightly outside the 470-870 nm range, we assumed the power-law relationship remains valid. Across study locations, Varanasi had the highest mean nighttime AOD at 550 nm (0.37 ± 0.13) from 19:30 to 05:30 local time, followed by Hyderabad (0.28 ± 0.05) and Gadanki (0.26 ± 0.07).

(ii) Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS): Surface reflectance is a critical parameter in aerosol radiative forcing calculations. We used the MCD43A4 Nadir Bidirectional Reflectance Distribution Function (BRDF)-Adjusted Reflectance (NBAR) product. This dataset (MODIS/Terra Nadir BRDF-Adjusted Reflectance Daily L3 Global 500m SIN Grid) provides spectral reflectance values at MODIS spectral band (centered at 0.469, 0.555, 0.645, 0.859, 1.24, 1.64, and 2.13 μm) at local solar noon (https://lpdaac.usgs.gov/product/mcd43a4v061). Surface reflectance values were found to be similar across study locations in the visible spectrum, with deviations in the infrared range. Among the sites, Hyderabad exhibited the highest reflectance, while Varanasi had the lowest (**Fig. S2**).

4. Methods

The methodology followed in this study (**Fig. 2**) is discussed in the following subsections.

4.1. Cloud Screening of the COBALD Profiles

COBALD measurements capture total backscattered light from a mixture of aerosols, clouds, and molecules. Isolating aerosol contributions from the total backscatter becomes challenging in the presence of clouds, necessitating the identification and exclusion of these cloud-contaminated

228   in-situ measurements. The total backscatter signal is typically expressed as the backscatter ratio

229   (BSR), defined as:

230
$$BSR = \frac{\beta_{Total}}{\beta_{mol}} \qquad (2)$$

231   where β_{mol} represents the molecular backscatter coefficient, while β_{Total} includes both particle and

232   molecular contributions. In cloud-free conditions, $\beta_{Total} = \beta_{mol} + \beta_{aer}$, where β_{aer} is the aerosol

233   backscatter coefficient.

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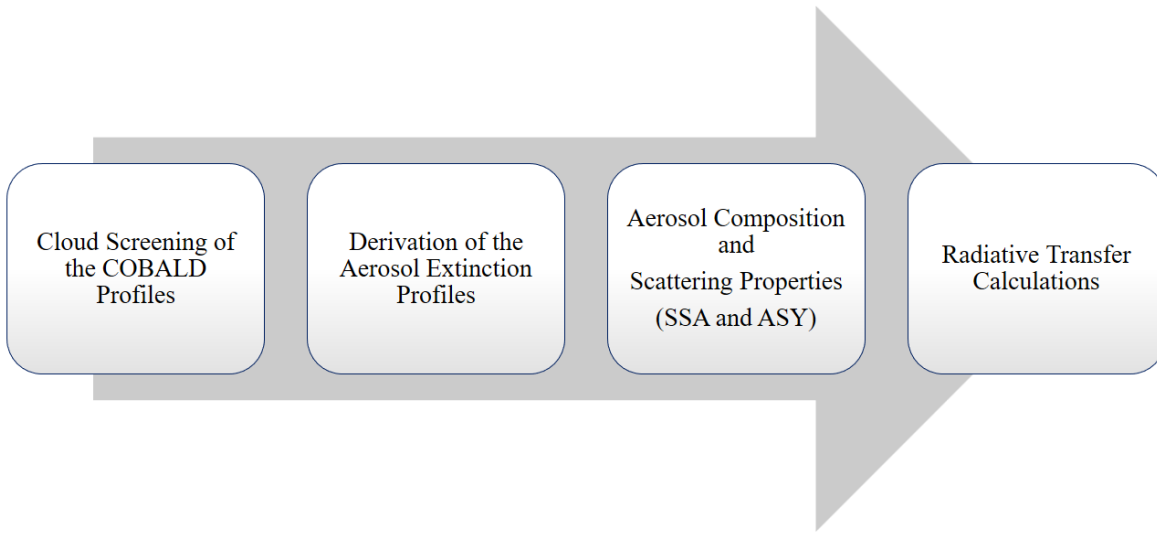
235   **Figure 2:** Schematic representation of the methodology used in this study. SSA and ASY refer to
236   single scattering albedo and asymmetry parameter, respectively.

237   The color index (CI) is defined as the 940-to-455nm ratio of the aerosol component of BSR:

238
$$CI = \frac{BSR_{940} - 1}{BSR_{455} - 1} \qquad (3)$$

239   CI is independent of particle number concentration and serves as a useful metric for

240   interpreting particle size. Both BSR and CI are indicators of aerosol presence. Cirrus clouds can

241   be identified separately using BSR at 455 nm and 940 nm or through CI, which enables

242   discrimination between ice particles (CI < 7) and aerosol (CI > 7) (Hanumanthu et al., 2020). Based

243   on previous studies, we set the following cloud screening criteria (above 10 km):

244   • $BSR_{455} < 1.12$ for the blue channel measurements, similar to Akhil Raj et al. (2022).

245   • $BSR940 < 2.5$ and $CI > 7$ for the red channel following Vernier et al. (2015).

246   Since these cloud screening criteria have not been validated in the lower atmosphere, we

247   employed an alternative approach that combines vertical gradients of air temperature and relative

248   humidity (RH) with altitude-dependent RH thresholds, as described in Xu et al. (2023), in the

249   lower atmosphere (below 10 km). While radiosonde data provide measurements in the UTLS and

250   beyond, this method may introduce uncertainties at higher altitudes due to radiosonde limitations

251   associated with the accuracy of RH measurements (Miloshevich et al., 2006). A detailed

252   description of this method is provided in the Supplement (**Section S1**), along with relevant relative

253   humidity (RH) thresholds (**Table S1**) and an example (**Fig. S3**).

254   Based on the above methodology, a backscatter ratio profile influenced by molecules and

255   aerosols is derived from the surface to the maximum altitude of a given COBALD measurement.

256   **4.2. Derivation of the Aerosol Extinction Profiles**

257   Under cloud-free conditions, the aerosol backscatter coefficient β_{aer} (expressed in $m^{-1}\ sr^{-1}$) at a

258   given wavelength λ and altitude z is obtained from **Eq. (2)**:

259
$$\beta_{aer,\lambda}(z) = \beta_{mol,\lambda}(z) \times (BSR(z) - 1) \qquad (4)$$

260   The molecular backscatter coefficients β_{mol} (expressed in $m^{-1}\ sr^{-1}$) are determined using the in-

261   situ temperature and pressure profiles from radiosonde measurements (Collis and Russell, 2005)

262   using the following equation:

263
$$\beta_{mol,\lambda}(z) = \frac{P(z)}{R_d T(z) M}\left(\frac{\lambda}{550}\right)^{-4.09} \times 10^{-32} \qquad (5)$$

264   where $R_d = 287$ J K^{-1} kg^{-1} is the gas constant for dry air, and M $= 4.81 \times 10^{32}$ kg is the molecular

265   weight of dry air. The aerosol backscatter coefficients were multiplied by a lidar ratio of 40 sr to

266   derive extinction coefficient profiles, consistent with previous studies over the Indian region (e.g.,

267   Gupta et al., 2021).

268   To reduce uncertainties in lidar ratios, the aerosol extinction coefficient profiles $\beta_{ext}(z)$ at

269   wavelength λ were normalized using MERRA-2 AOD:

270
$$\beta_{ext,scaled}(\lambda, z) = \beta_{ext}(\lambda, z) \times \frac{AOD_{MERRA-2}(\lambda)}{AOD_{COBALD}(\lambda)} \qquad (6)$$

271   where $AOD_{COBALD}(\lambda)$ represents the AOD obtained by integrating the derived aerosol

272   extinction profile (with a lidar ratio of 40 sr). This normalization ensures consistency between the

273   columnar loading and extinction profiles, reducing biases in the estimates of aerosol direct

274   radiative effects (Santhosh et al., 2024b).

275 **4.3. Aerosol Composition and Scattering Properties**

276   The composition of aerosols in the UTLS region during ATAL periods remains highly variable

277   across different measurement techniques and time periods, posing a significant challenge for

278   accurate characterization (**Table 2**). Despite differences, multiple studies consistently report the

279   presence of sulfates, nitrates, organic carbon, and ammonium aerosols in varying proportions.

280 **Table 2**: Summary of studies on ATAL aerosol composition using different models and
281 measurement techniques.

Study Method and Period	Aerosol Composition at the UTLS	Reference
Coupled Aerosol – Radiation – Earth System Model (2015, 2017, 2021)	Nitrate, Organics, Sulfate, Ammonium aerosols between 15°N–45°N and 0°E–160°E	Zhu et al. (2024)
Aircraft measurements	Nitrate, Ammonium, Sulfate, and Organic Carbon	Appel et al. (2022)

(2017)		
Offline ion chromatography (2017)	Nitrate and Nitrite aerosols	Vernier et al. (2022)
Earth System Model (2017 – 2021)	Nitrate (~30 – 40 %), Nitric Acid	Yu et al. (2022)
Earth System Model (2000 – 2015)	Sulfate (40%), secondary + primary organics (45%), Ammonium (14%), Trace (less than 3%) amount of BC	Bossolasco et al. (2021)
Chemical Transport Model (2013)	Organic Carbon, Nitrate, Sulfate, Ammonium	Fairlie et al. (2020)
Atmospheric Chemistry and General Circulation Model	Mineral Dust, Water Soluble (Sulfate and Nitrate) aerosols	Ma et al. (2019)
Satellite + Aircraft + Trajectory simulations + Cloud Chamber experiments (1997, 2002 – 2012, 2017)	Ammonium Nitrate	Hopfner et al. (2019)

282   To account for this variability, we considered seven UTLS aerosol scenarios with different

283   fractions of sulfate (SUL), nitrate (NIT), organic carbon (OC), and ammonium (AM), assuming

284   external mixing (**Table 3**). Among these scenarios, the OC-dominant combination (with 50% OC,

285   denoted as C1) and the combination with 40% OC and 30% AM (denoted as C2) are adapted,

286   respectively, from Bossolasco et al. (2021) and Appel et al. (2022). Two ideal scenarios are also

287   assumed where the sulfate and nitrate aerosols contribute 100% of the UTLS aerosols (SUL and

288   NIT, respectively). The SUL scenario serves as a reference, representing UTLS aerosols with

289   background sulfate levels similar to those in the stratosphere (Junge and Manson, 1961). The NIT

290   scenario defines an upper baseline, while the remaining cases (denoted as C1 to C5) explore

291   varying nitrate compositions from 0 to 0.4.

Table 3: Aerosol mixing scenarios considered for UTLS aerosols, with fractional compositions (f_i) of sulfates (SUL), nitrates (NIT), organic carbon (OC), and ammonium sulfate (AM).

Combination	Fractional composition (f_i)			
	SUL	NIT	OC	AM
SUL	1	0	0	0
NIT	0	1	0	0
C1*	0.4	0	0.5	0.1
C2**	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3
C3	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2
C4	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.3
C5	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.4

* This combination is adapted from Bossolasco et al. (2021)

**This combination is adapted from Appel et al. (2022)

The SSA and ASY of each aerosol species were derived from their size distribution parameters and complex refractive indices under dry conditions (**Table S2**) using the Mie scattering theory, assuming that all the aerosol species follow the log-normal size distribution. If f_i is the fraction of an individual aerosol species in a given combination, then SSA and ASY of the combination are obtained using the following equations:

$$SSA(\lambda) = \frac{\sum_i f_i SSA_i(\lambda)}{\sum_i f_i} \qquad (7)$$

$$ASY(\lambda) = \frac{\sum_i f_i ASY_i(\lambda)}{\sum_i f_i} \qquad (8)$$

where SSAi and ASYi denote the single scattering albedo and asymmetry parameter of respective aerosol species at a given wavelength λ. These derived SSA and ASY for each aerosol combination at 455 and 940 nm are illustrated in **Figure 3**.

Among the compositions, the OC-dominant scenario (C1) exhibits the lowest SSA, indicating higher absorption, while SSA increases with decreasing OC fractions and increasing fractions of

308 nitrates and ammonium (C2- C5). Sulfates and nitrates have SSA=1 at both wavelengths (445 nm

309 and 940 nm), with slight ASY differences (e.g., $ASY_{SUL} = 0.724$, $ASY_{NIT} = 0.718$ at 445 nm and

310 $ASY_{SUL} = 0.679$, $ASY_{NIT} = 0.549$ at 940 nm). These SSA and ASY values were applied to altitude

311 bins in the 10- to 20-km range.

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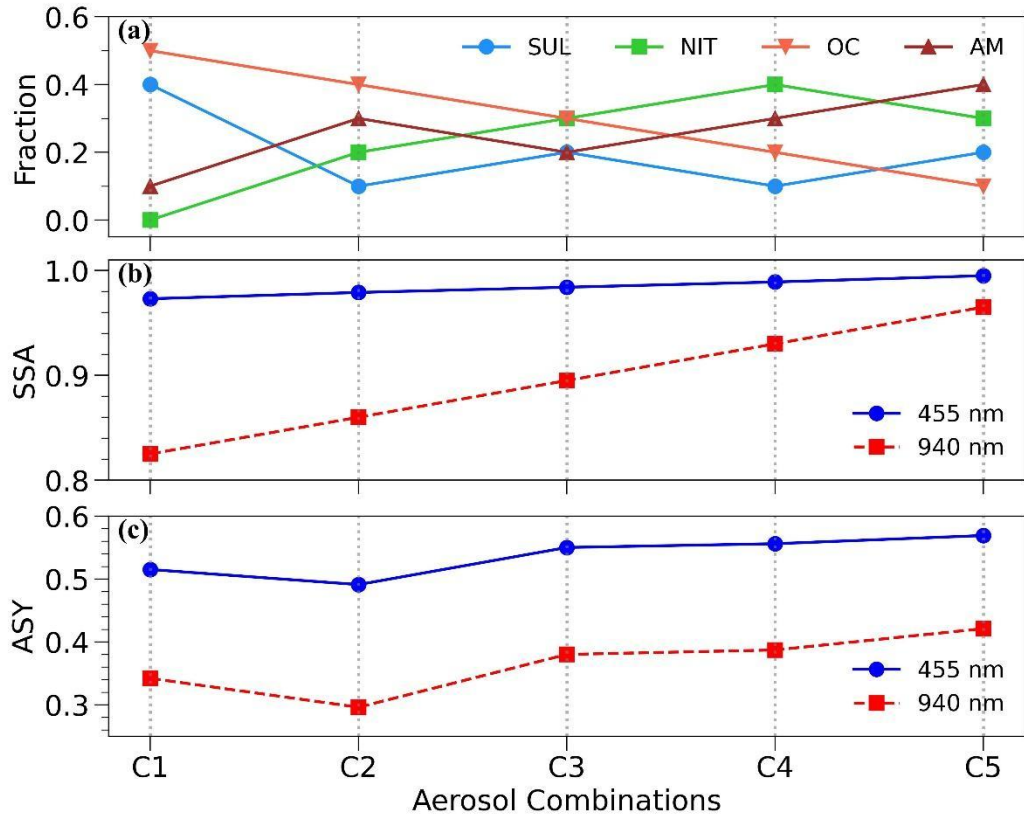

314 **Figure 3:** (a) Fractional contribution of aerosol species—sulfate (SUL), nitrate (NIT), organic
315 carbon (OC), and ammonium (AM)—in the aerosol mixing combinations (C1 to C5) considered
316 in this study. (b) Single Scattering Albedo (SSA) and (c) Asymmetry Parameter (ASY)
317 corresponding to each combination under dry conditions.

318 In the lower atmosphere (below 10 km), aerosol composition/typing was characterized using

319 seven-day air mass back trajectories at 500 m (boundary layer) and 4000 m (free troposphere)

320 above mean sea level, generated using the HYbrid Single Particle Lagrangian Integrated Trajectory

321 (HYSPLIT) model (Stein et al., 2015). Trajectories were clustered based on spatial similarity using

322 hierarchical clustering and the Total Spatial Variance (TSV) method, optimizing the number of

323 clusters where further TSV reduction provides minimal improvement. This approach identifies

324 distinct transport pathways shaped by synoptic-scale meteorology, allowing the classification of

325 aerosol types based on air mass origin, transport history, and residence time over source regions.

326 A similar approach was used by Pawar et al. (2015) in Pune to identify aerosol types through back

327 trajectory analysis. After categorizing the air-mass clusters based on potential aerosol types from

328 the Optical Properties of Aerosols and Clouds (OPAC) database (Hess et al., 1998; **Table S3**), the

329 corresponding wavelength and RH-dependent aerosol scattering properties (SSA and ASY) were

330 obtained. A detailed description of this method is provided in **Section S2** (Supplementary

331 Information) along with the identified aerosol types through back trajectory clusters at the three

332 locations for the two altitude levels (**Figure S4**). Since marine aerosols typically have a low scale

333 height (< 2 km), their influence was considered only within the boundary layer. Additionally, air

334 masses of oceanic origin that remained over land for more than 24 hours before arrival were

335 reclassified as continental aerosols.

4.4. Radiative Transfer Calculations

337 The radiative forcing due to aerosols at a given level of the atmosphere is the difference

338 between the radiative fluxes under aerosol-laden and no-aerosol (and without clouds) conditions.

339 For a given layer in the atmospheric column with its vertical thickness Δz (in km), this radiative

340 forcing (RF, in W m^{-2}) at its top and bottom levels is mathematically expressed as:

$$RF_{Top} = \left(F_{wa}^{\downarrow} - F_{wa}^{\uparrow}\right)_{Top} - \left(F_{na}^{\downarrow} - F_{na}^{\uparrow}\right)_{Top} \qquad (9)$$

$$RF_{Bot} = \left(F_{wa}^{\downarrow} - F_{wa}^{\uparrow}\right)_{Bot} - \left(F_{na}^{\downarrow} - F_{na}^{\uparrow}\right)_{Bot} \qquad (10)$$

343 Here, $F_{wa}^{\downarrow}$ and $F_{wa}^{\uparrow}$ represent the downward and upward radiative fluxes in aerosol-laden

344 conditions, while $F_{na}^{\downarrow}$ and $F_{na}^{\uparrow}$ denote the corresponding fluxes under no-aerosol (and without

345   clouds) conditions.

346   The Aerosol Radiative Forcing (ARF) of this atmospheric layer is the difference between the

347   RF at its top and bottom levels, which quantifies the amount of energy trapped within the layer

348   and represents the atmospheric absorption due to aerosols (Gadhavi and Jayaraman, 2006).

349   Mathematically,

$$ARF \equiv \Delta RF = RF_{Top} - RF_{Bot} \qquad (11)$$

350

351   The rate at which the atmosphere heats up due to aerosols (referred to as HR, in K day^{-1}) for a

352   given layer can be determined using the following equation (Liou, 2002):

$$HR = \frac{\partial T}{\partial t} = \frac{g}{C_p}\left(\frac{\Delta RF}{\Delta P}\right) = \frac{-1}{\rho C_p}\left(\frac{\Delta RF}{\Delta z}\right) \qquad (12)$$

353

354   In this equation, g represents the acceleration due to gravity, and C_p denotes the isobaric

355   specific heat capacity of dry air (~ 1006 J Kg^{-1} K^{-1}). ΔP signifies the pressure difference between

356   the top and bottom boundaries of the atmospheric layer, ρ indicates the density of the air (in kg m^{-3}

357   ^{3}), and $\Delta RF/\Delta z$ represents the radiative power absorbed or emitted by the medium per unit volume

358   of the atmosphere (in W m^{-3}). Since the atmosphere consists of several vertically heterogeneous

359   layers, repeating the above calculation for each layer yields the profile of the heating rate.

360   For estimating the radiative forcing and heating rates associated with UTLS aerosols, the

361   aerosol profiles (extinction coefficient, SSA, and ASY) and the atmospheric profiles (pressure,

362   temperature, water vapor density, and ozone density) are provided as input into the Santa Barbara

363   DISORT (discrete ordinate radiative transfer) Atmospheric Radiative Transfer (SBDART) model

364   (Ricchiazzi et al. 1998). This computational tool calculates plane-parallel radiative transfer in

365   various atmospheric and surface conditions, including clear and cloudy scenarios. The DISORT

366   module, which employs a numerically stable algorithm, is used to solve the equations of plane-

367   parallel radiative transfer in vertically inhomogeneous atmospheres (Stamnes et al., 1988). The

368   accuracy of the SBDART model is estimated to be within a few percent for clear-sky conditions.

369   The calculations are performed in the shortwave (SW) region (0.25–4 µm) with a spectral

370   resolution of 0.005 µm and 8 radiation streams at 1-h intervals for a range of solar zenith angles

371   to obtain a 24-hour average. Shortwave ARF is computed for both the atmospheric column

372   (extending from the surface at 0 km up to 30 km) and specifically for the UTLS region (12–20

373   km). Additionally, heating rate profiles are derived for the UTLS layer across all seven previously

374   discussed aerosol scenarios.

375   **5.   Results and Discussions**

376   **5.1. Spatial Variability of ATAL Aerosols in the UTLS Region**

377   **Figure 4** presents the mean cloud-screened backscatter ratio at 455 nm (BSR455) for the UTLS

378   region over the study locations. The approximate vertical extent of the ATAL region is adapted

379   from Akhil Raj et al. (2022), where its boundaries are determined based on dynamic constraints.

380   The lower boundary corresponds to the convective outflow level, identified as the altitude where

381   the potential temperature gradient reaches a minimum below the cold point tropopause (CPT) after

382   applying a nine-point running mean. The upper boundary is defined by the altitude of maximum

383   stability (L_{maxS}), derived from the squared Brunt- Väisälä frequency (N^2). Their analysis indicates

384   that L_{maxS} is located 1–2.7 km above the CPT, corresponding to a potential temperature of

385   approximately 442.11 ± 25.64 K (454.39 ± 13.89 K) over the Indian region, roughly 19 km above

386   the Earth's surface. The convective outflow level, on the other hand, is observed at ~ 13 km across

387   all locations. Based on these criteria, we define the ATAL region's approximate vertical extent

388   between 13 km to 19 km, corresponding to a potential temperature range of 350 K to 440 K.

389   A consistent increase in aerosols is observed in the 16-18 km altitude range (365-400 K

390   potential temperature) across all study locations. The highest BSR455 values are recorded over

391   Varanasi and Hyderabad (~1.07), followed by Gadanki (~1.06), with site-specific variations in

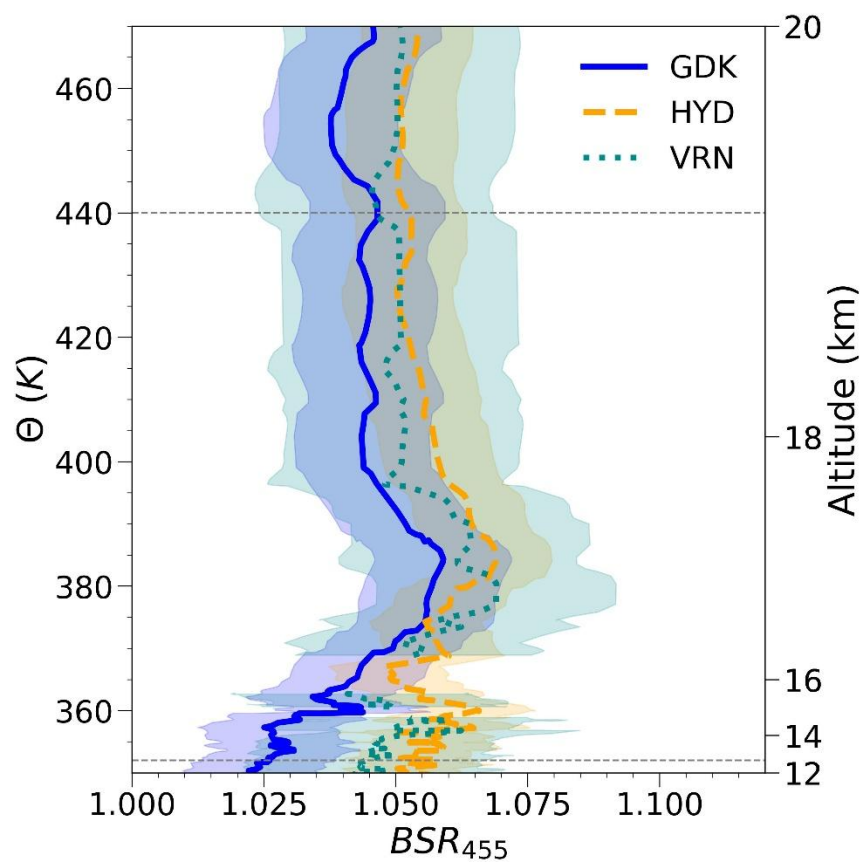
392   backscatter profiles. These findings align with previous ATAL aerosol observations reported by

393   Akhil Raj et al. (2022). The maximum BSR_{455} value (1.07 over Varanasi) is comparable to that

394   observed over Nainital (29.35°N, 79.46°E) in August 2016 (Hanumanthu et al., 2020). For

395   reference, CALIPSO-derived BSR_{532} values for ATAL have been reported to range between 1.10

396   and 1.15, with an associated depolarization ratio of < 5% (Vernier et al., 2011), further supporting

397   the presence of submicron aerosols in this region.

398

399   **Figure 4:** Mean cloud-screened backscatter ratios at 455 nm plotted against potential temperature
400   (Θ) on the primary y-axis and altitude on the secondary y-axis over Gadanki (GDK), Hyderabad
401   (HYD), and Varanasi (VRN). The dashed lines at 13 km and 19 km indicate the approximate
402   vertical extent of ATAL aerosols (see text for details).

403   Despite the observed enhancements, no clear monotonic trend in aerosol concentration

404   emerges across the study locations, which are positioned at different geographical points relative

405   to the ATAL core: Gadanki (southern periphery), Hyderabad (transition region), and Varanasi

406   (central ATAL region). However, the slightly lower aerosol BSR at Gadanki suggests a weaker

407   ATAL influence at the outermost edge. Further validation through extensive in-situ and satellite-

408   based observations is necessary to confirm these spatial trends and understand the seasonal and

409   inter-annual variability of ATAL aerosols.

410   **5.2. Impact of UTLS Aerosol Composition on Radiative Forcing and its Contribution to the**

411   **Atmospheric Column**

412   **Figure 5(a)** illustrates the ARF in the UTLS region, which exhibits a net positive forcing

413   (warming) across all aerosol combinations. However, under sulfate- and nitrate-dominant

414   scenarios (SUL and NIT, respectively), the warming effect is negligible (<0.02 W m^{-2}) across all

415   locations. In contrast, mixed aerosol scenarios (C1–C5) display a stronger UTLS forcing, ranging

416   from 0.06 to 0.23 W m^{-2} over Gadanki, 0.06 to 0.29 W m^{-2} over Hyderabad, and 0.07 to 0.29 W

417   m^{-2} over Varanasi. Similar magnitudes are observed in Hyderabad and Varanasi, with slightly

418   lower values over Gadanki, indicating a spatial variability in UTLS absorption. Among the mixed

419   aerosol scenarios, the OC-dominant case (C1) exhibits the highest UTLS absorption, whereas C5,

420   where organic carbon (OC) contributes only 10% and ammonium and nitrate dominate (70%),

421   shows the lowest absorption. The successive decrease in UTLS absorption from C1 to C5

422   highlights the role of absorbing aerosols in enhancing radiative warming in the UTLS. Considering

423   the estimates using previously reported aerosol compositions (C1 from Bossolasco et al., 2021 and

424   C2 from Appel et al., 2022), the UTLS forcing ranged from 0.19 to 0.29 W m^{-2} across different

425   locations.

426   When considering the total aerosol radiative forcing (ARF_{ATM}), the highest values are observed

427   over Varanasi (up to 22.5 W m^{-2}), followed by Hyderabad (up to 16.4 W m^{-2}) and Gadanki (up to

428   8.92 W m^{-2}) (**Fig. 5(b)**). Since these forcing results from aerosols across multiple atmospheric

429   layers, the UTLS contribution is quantified in terms of the percent fraction of the total ARF (**Fig.**

430   **5(c)**). The OC-dominant scenario (C1) exhibits the highest relative UTLS contribution (up to

431   2.7%), with a decreasing trend as the OC fraction is reduced (C2–C5), consistent with the ARF_{UTLS}

432   variations discussed earlier. In sulfate- and nitrate-dominant cases (SUL and NIT), the UTLS

433   contribution is minimal (0.1%).

434

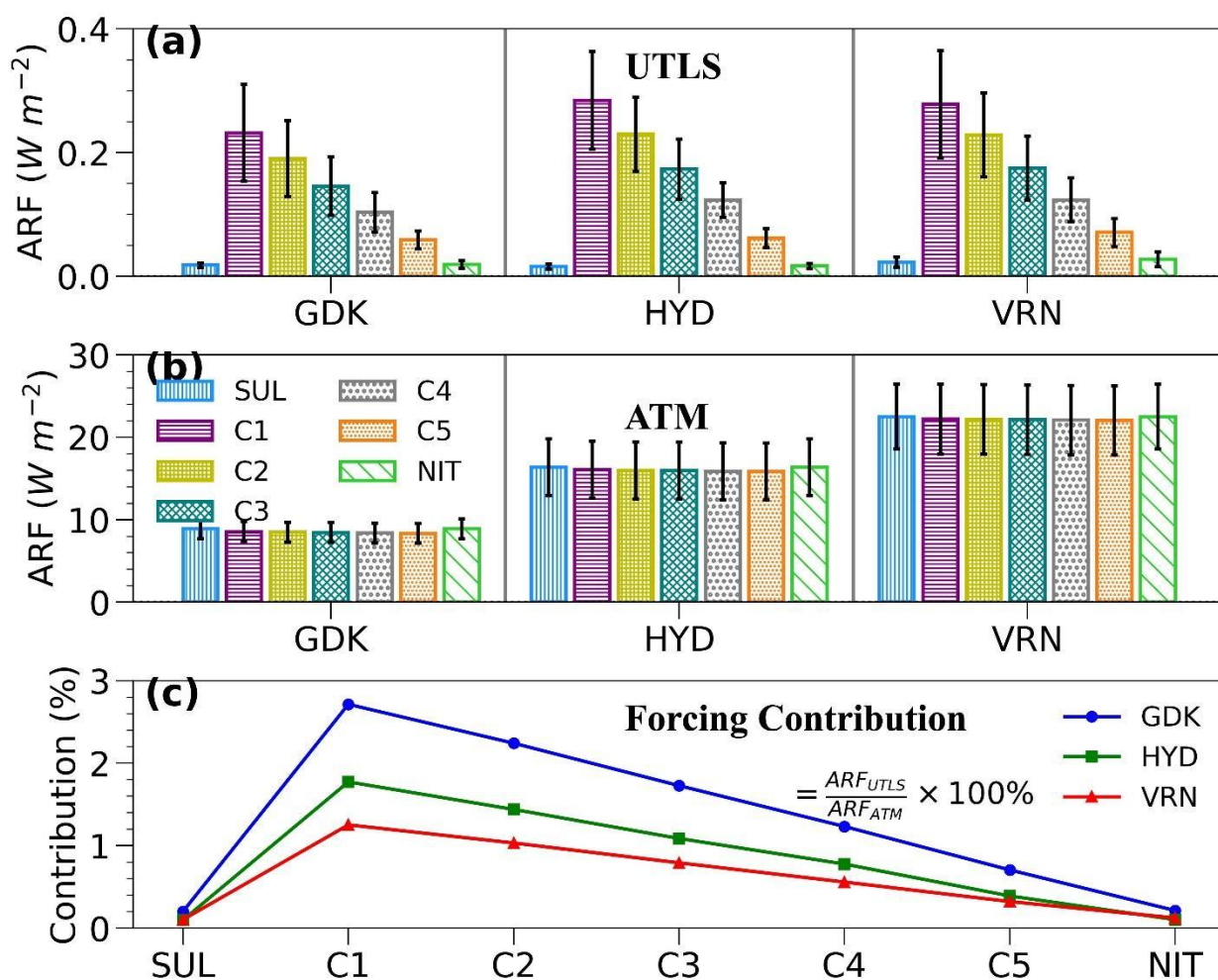



Figure 5: Aerosol Radiative Forcing (ARF) for different aerosol scenarios in the UTLS region
over Gadanki (GDK), Hyderabad (HYD), and Varanasi (VRN) during the study period: (a) ARF

437 in the UTLS region, (b) ARF in the total atmospheric column from the surface to 30 km, and (c)
438 percent fractional contribution of UTLS forcing to the total atmospheric forcing.

439   The variation in UTLS forcing contribution across study locations suggests differences in the

440 overall aerosol distribution within the atmospheric column. Despite similar absolute UTLS forcing

441 values, its relative contribution is highest over Gadanki, moderate over Hyderabad, and lowest

442 over Varanasi. This pattern suggests that over Varanasi, the dominant contribution to atmospheric

443 absorption comes from aerosols in the lower atmosphere, likely driven by the presence of strongly

444 absorbing aerosols in this location (**Table S3**). Conversely, at Gadanki, the lower atmosphere

445 appears to be dominated by scattering aerosols, resulting in reduced absorption, which increases

446 the relative importance of UTLS forcing. These findings underscore the significant impact of lower

447 atmospheric aerosol composition on the contribution of UTLS aerosols to total atmospheric

448 forcing at various locations.

449   To quantify the influence of aerosol composition on radiative forcing in the UTLS, we

450 examined the difference in radiative forcing (δARF) between various aerosol scenarios and a

451 sulfate-dominant (SUL) reference case. The δARF was computed as:

452
$$\delta ARF_x = ARF_x - ARF_{SUL} \qquad (13)$$

453 where x represents the mixed-aerosol compositions (C1 to C5) and nitrate-dominant (NIT)

454 composition. The sign of δARF$_x$ indicates whether a given aerosol composition induces further

455 warming or cooling in the UTLS and the atmospheric column relative to the sulfate baseline.

456   In the UTLS, δARF$_x$ values are predominantly positive, suggesting that all tested aerosol

457 compositions—except the nitrate-dominant (NIT) case—contribute to warming (**Fig. 6a**). The

458 δARF for the NIT scenario remains close to zero across all locations, implying minimal radiative

459 influence from nitrate aerosols in the UTLS. The magnitude of δARF$_x$ varies significantly, ranging

from 0.06 to 0.28 W m^{-2} (an increase of 300–1400%) over Varanasi, 0.05 to 0.27 W m^{-2} (250–

1300%) over Hyderabad, and 0.03 to 0.2 W m^{-2} (150–1000%) over Gadanki. These large

variations highlight the strong sensitivity of UTLS radiative forcing to aerosol composition, where

even small changes in aerosol properties result in disproportionately large changes in forcing.

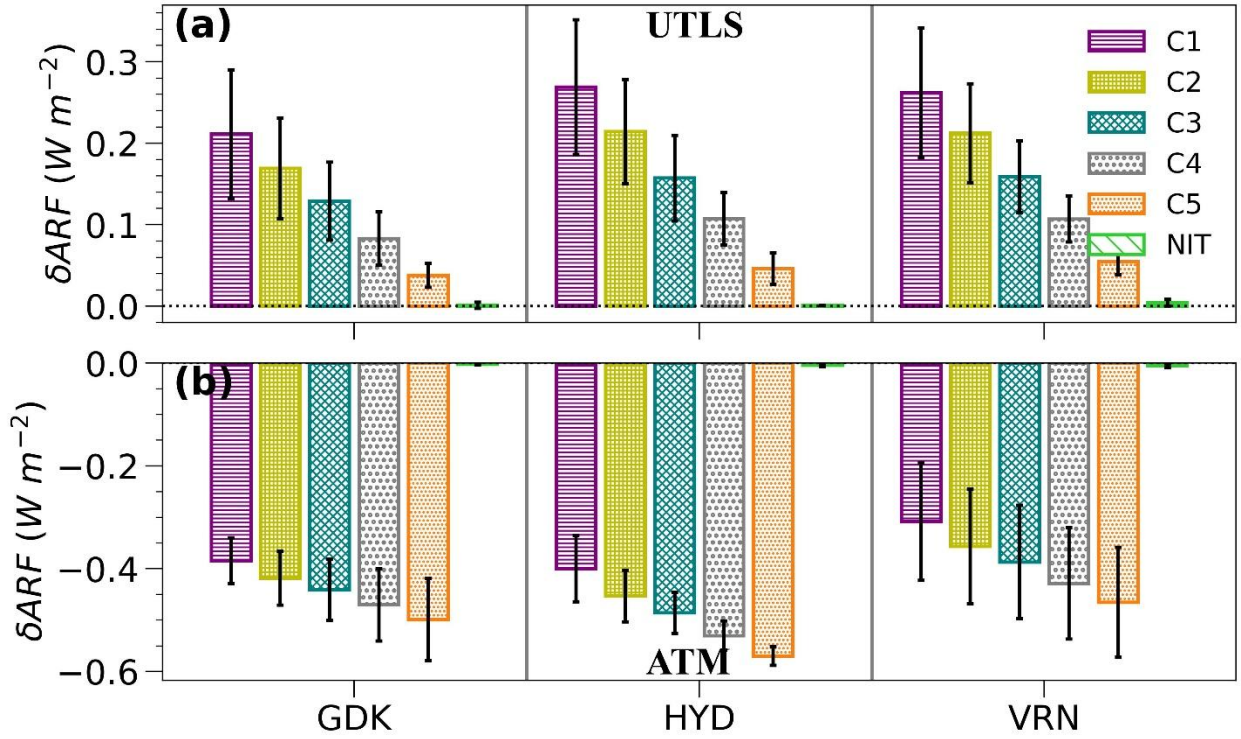



Figure 6: Differences in Aerosol Radiative Forcing (δARF) due to changes in aerosol composition
within the UTLS region, with sulfate forcing as the reference (δARF$_x$ = ARF$_x$ − ARF$_{SUL}$, where
'x' represents NIT and C1 to C5): (a) δARF in the UTLS region and (b) δARF for the entire
atmospheric column.

Among the mixed compositions (C1-C5), the largest δARFx occurs in the OC-dominant

scenario (C1) (Bossolasco et al., 2021), highlighting the strong absorptive nature of organic carbon

in the UTLS. A progressive reduction in δARF is observed with decreasing OC fraction and

increasing nitrate and ammonium content (C2 to C5), indicating that absorbing aerosols, such as

OC, substantially modify the UTLS radiative forcing. In the atmospheric column, δARF$_{ATM}$ values

474   are negative, indicating that changes in UTLS aerosol composition led to a decrease in atmospheric

475   forcing (**Fig. 6b**). The magnitudes of δARF_{ATM} reach approximately -0.5 W m^{-2} (5%) over

476   Gadanki, -0.6 W m^{-2} (4%) over Hyderabad, and -0.5 W m^{-2} (2.3%) over Varanasi. This suggests

477   that while UTLS aerosol composition significantly alters radiative forcing at high altitudes, the net

478   effect on the entire atmospheric column remains relatively modest.

479   **5.3. Influence of Aerosol Composition on Heating Rates in the UTLS**

480   Shortwave heating rates associated with mixed-type aerosol compositions in the UTLS (C1

481   to C5) are significantly higher than those observed under sulfate- (SUL) and nitrate-dominant

482   (NIT) scenarios (**Fig. 7**). Neither the SUL nor NIT cases exhibit distinct heating rate patterns at

483   ATAL altitudes, with only slight warming observed, peaking at approximately 0.003 K day^{-1}. This

484   negligible difference between sulfate and nitrate aerosols can be attributed to their similar optical

485   properties, as discussed in Santhosh et al. (2025). In contrast, enhanced heating rates are observed

486   between 16–18 km (365–404 K potential temperature) over Gadanki, 14–16 km (357–366 K) over

487   Hyderabad, and 16–18 km (367–403 K) over Varanasi for the mixed aerosol scenarios (C1 to C5).

488   The heating in the ATAL layer reaches a maximum of 0.03 K day^{-1}, with Varanasi exhibiting

489   notably higher heating rates than the other locations.

490   Consistent with the discussion on UTLS radiative forcing, the highest heating rates occur in

491   the OC-dominant composition (C1). A progressive decline is observed as the OC fraction

492   decreases while ammonium and nitrate fractions increase (C2 to C5). These results highlight the

493   warming effect of absorbing aerosols in the UTLS. Previous studies, such as Fadnavis et al. (2022),

494   reported UTLS warming due to anthropogenic aerosols, with estimates ranging from 0.02 to 0.3

495   K per month, equivalent to an upper limit of ~0.01 K day^{-1}. Similarly, carbonaceous aerosols with

496   strong absorption characteristics have been shown to increase UTLS heating by 0.001 to 0.02 K

497   day^{-1} (Chavan et al., 2021).

498

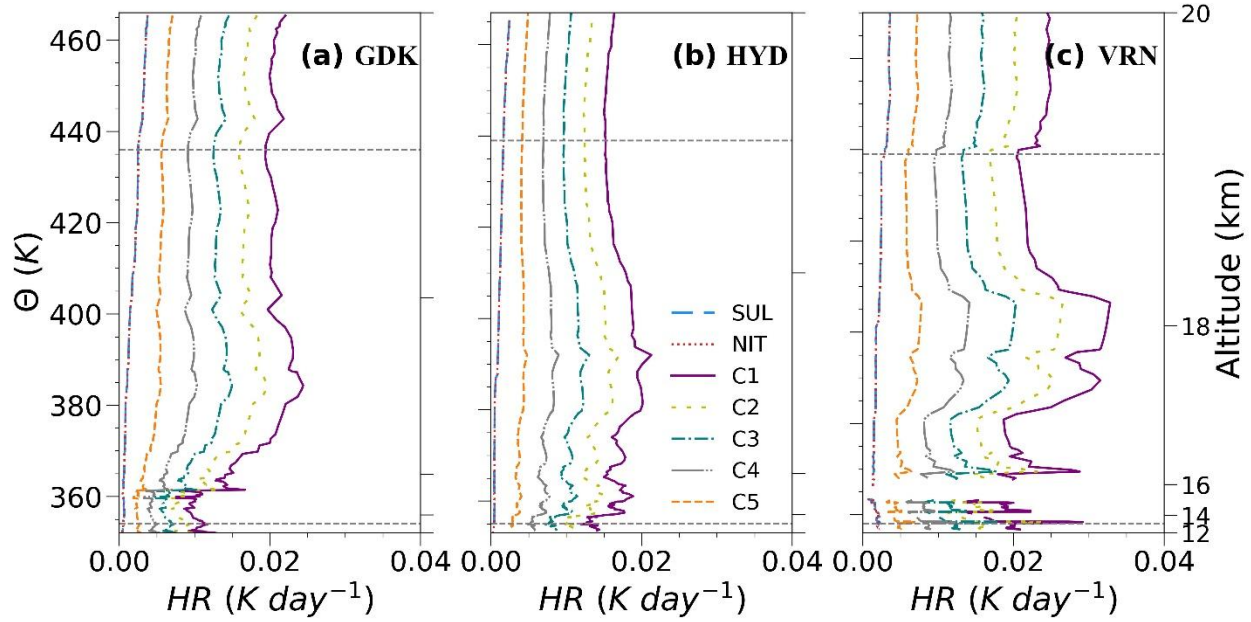



Figure 7: Aerosol heating rates in the UTLS plotted against potential temperature (Θ) and altitude
over (a) Gadanki, (b) Hyderabad, and (c) Varanasi. The gray dashed lines at 13 km and 19 km
indicate the approximate vertical extent of ATAL.

502   To evaluate the sensitivity of heating rates to changes in aerosol composition within the ATAL

503   region, we estimate the difference in heating rates (δHR) for the nitrate (NIT) and mixed-aerosol

504   compositions (C1–C5) relative to the sulfate (SUL) reference scenario across 13–19 km as:

505    $$\delta HR_x = HR_x - HR_{SUL} \qquad (14)$$

506   where *x* represents aerosol compositions other than sulfates. The δHR values range from ~0 to

507   0.03 K day^{-1} across the locations (**Fig. 8**).

508

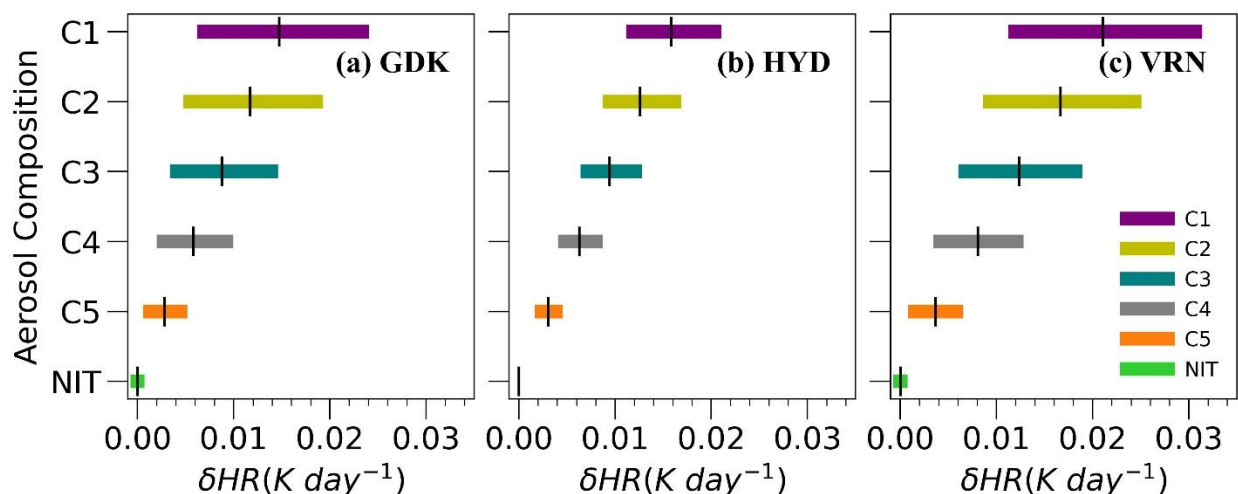



Figure 8: Range of changes in aerosol heating rates due to different aerosol compositions relative to the sulfate-dominant scenario ($\delta HR = HR_x - HR_{SUL}$, where 'x' represents compositions other than sulfates) over (a) Gadanki (GDK), (b) Hyderabad (HYD), and (c) Varanasi (VRN). Horizontal bars represent the minimum-to-maximum range of δHR, while small black vertical markers indicate the mean values.

A broader range of δHR is observed for compositions with a higher OC fraction, such as C1 (50% OC) and C2 (40% OC), leading to heating rate increases from 0.01 to 0.03 K day^{-1}, which is approximately 10–30 times larger than the sulfate baseline. As the OC fraction decreases, the δHR range also diminishes, similar to the δARF trend discussed earlier. Due to the comparable heating rates of nitrate and sulfate aerosols in the UTLS, the δHR associated with the NIT scenario remains negligible. However, when nitrates constitute a significant portion of the mixed compositions (e.g., 30% in C5 and 40% in C4), along with ammonium aerosols (40% in C5 and 30% in C4), δHR values become non-negligible (~0.001 to 0.01 K day^{-1}), leading to a 10-fold increase in heating rates compared to the sulfate reference. These results confirm that variations in aerosol composition in the UTLS have a substantial impact on heating rates, further influencing radiative effects and atmospheric stability in this region.

525

5.4. Comparison of Heating Rates at Point Locations Relative to Spatially Averaged Estimates

Since this study focuses on heating rates at specific point locations, it is valuable to compare these estimates with those obtained for a broader spatial domain using a similar methodology. A recent study by Santhosh et al. (2025) examined radiative forcing and heating rates in the 12–20 km altitude range over a broader geographic region within the Asian Summer Monsoon Anticyclone (ASMA) (25°N–37.5°N, 40°E–95°E) using Cloud-Aerosol Lidar with Orthogonal Polarization (CALIOP) data. In that study, three dominant aerosol scenarios were considered in the UTLS: sulfate, nitrate, and anthropogenic aerosols. The sulfate and nitrate aerosols had microphysical properties similar to those in our study, while the anthropogenic aerosol model was based on the continental clean aerosol model of Hess et al. (1998), representing a mixed-aerosol scenario.

To assess the representativeness of the point-location heating rates, we compare the sulfate- and nitrate-dominated cases from the present study with the corresponding heating rates reported by Santhosh et al. (2025). Although a direct comparison of mixed aerosols is more complex due to differences in aerosol definitions, we use the composition with the highest heating rates from this study (C1) as a reference for comparison against the anthropogenic heating rates reported by Santhosh et al. (2025).

Our analysis reveals that heating rates at individual locations (Gadanki, Hyderabad, and Varanasi) are slightly higher than the spatially averaged heating rates over the ASMA region under sulfate- and nitrate-dominant scenarios (**Fig. 9**). However, for the mixed-aerosol scenarios, the

547   heating rates estimated over the ASMA region exceed those observed at individual point locations.

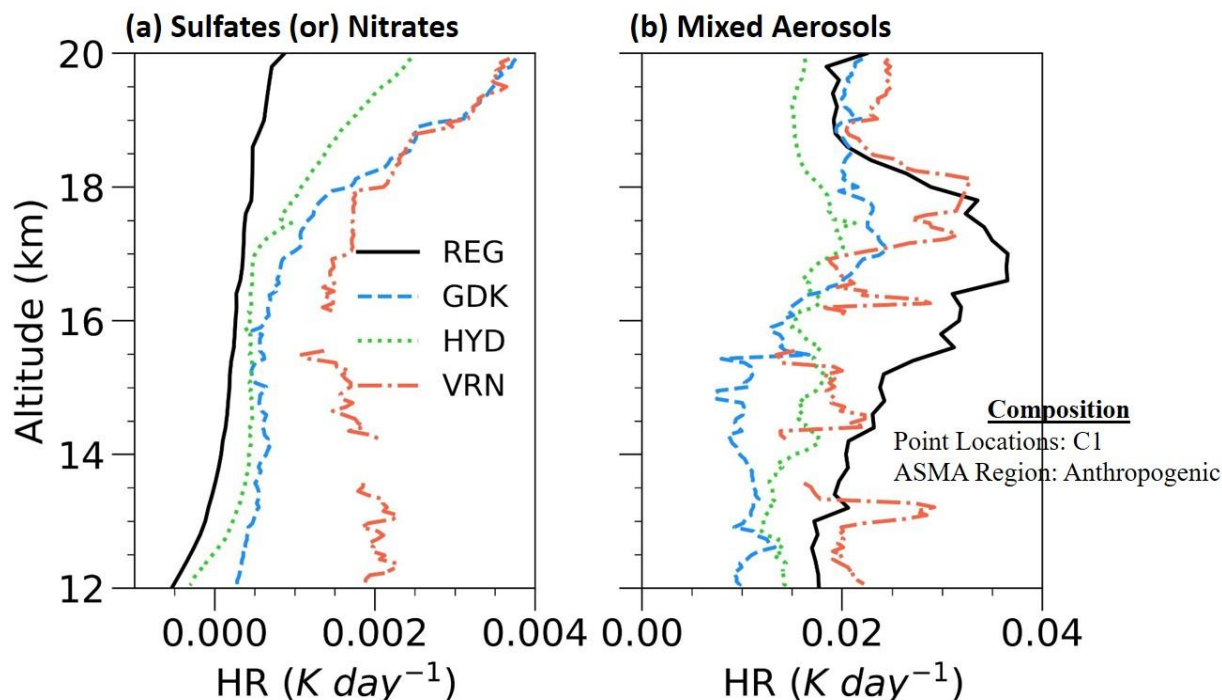



Figure 9: Comparison of UTLS heating rates for (a) sulfate or nitrate-dominant composition and
(b) mixed aerosol composition across the UTLS region (REG: 25°N–37.5°N, 40°E–95°E, adapted
from Santhosh et al. (2025)), as well as over Gadanki (GDK), Hyderabad (HYD), and Varanasi
(VRN). In the mixed aerosol scenario, the composition with the highest observed heating rates
(C1) is compared with the anthropogenic composition in the UTLS region reported by Santhosh
et al. (2025). As Santhosh et al. (2025) also observed a near-similar heating rate pattern for sulfates
and nitrates, consistent with the present study, only heating rates with nitrates are plotted here.

556   This discrepancy can be attributed to the interplay between aerosol optical properties and

557   spatial averaging effects. Santhosh et al. (2025) assumed that the climatological mean and standard

558   deviation profiles of aerosol backscatter ratios sufficiently capture the spatial heterogeneity of

559   ATAL in radiative transfer calculations. Scattering aerosols, such as sulfates and nitrates, primarily

560   reflect shortwave radiation and do not significantly contribute to global warming or atmospheric

561   heating. When averaged over a large spatial domain, the weak radiative response of these aerosols

562   is integrated across a broader region, leading to lower overall heating rates.

563   In contrast, the heating effects of absorbing aerosols within mixed-aerosol scenarios are less

564   sensitive to spatial heterogeneity. Even small fractions of absorbing aerosols in the ATAL

565   contribute to warming, and regional averaging enhances this consistent heating effect. This

566   explains why the ASMA-wide mixed-aerosol heating rates exceed those at point locations. These

567   findings suggest that the mixed-aerosol compositions considered in this study may lead to stronger

568   warming in the UTLS over a broader spatial domain. Further investigations with realistic

569   observational constraints and model validation are needed to better quantify these effects.

570   **6. Summary and Conclusions**

571   This study presents a detailed analysis of the shortwave radiative impacts of monsoon UTLS

572   aerosols, focusing on radiative forcing and heating rates derived from balloon-borne in situ

573   measurements conducted as part of the Balloon Measurement Campaigns of the Asian Tropopause

574   Aerosol Layer (BATAL) between 2014 and 2018. To assess aerosol effects, we considered seven

575   aerosol compositions dominated by different species: (i) sulfate (SUL), representing the

576   background or reference condition, (ii) nitrate (NIT), a primarily scattering aerosol, and (iii) five

577   mixed-type aerosol scenarios incorporating varying fractions of sulfates, nitrates, organic carbon,

578   and ammonium aerosols. The key findings from this study, based on measurements at Gadanki,

579   Hyderabad, and Varanasi, are summarized as follows:

580   (i)   **Aerosol Enhancement in ATAL Altitudes**: A significant enhancement in aerosol

581   backscatter was observed in the 13–19 km altitude range across all locations, with

582   BSR455 peaks reaching up to 1.07 over Varanasi and Hyderabad and 1.06 over Gadanki.

583   (ii)   **UTLS Radiative Forcing and its contribution to total atmospheric forcing:** A net

584   positive aerosol forcing was observed in the UTLS region, contributing between 0.1%

585   and 3% of the total atmospheric column forcing. Among the tested compositions, the

scenario with 50% organic carbon (C1) exhibited the highest contribution (1.25%–3%), whereas nitrate- and sulfate-dominated scenarios contributed significantly less (0.1%–0.2%). The highest UTLS forcing estimates were recorded over Varanasi and Hyderabad (~0.3 W m^{-2}), followed by Gadanki (0.23 W m^{-2}). Under sulfate- and nitrate-dominant conditions, forcing remained nearly uniform across locations, with values not exceeding 0.02 W m^{-2}. The UTLS forcing decreased with increasing fractions of nitrate and ammonium.

(iii) **Heating Rates in the UTLS Region:** The heating rate profiles for mixed-aerosol compositions exhibited a notable increase in aerosol-induced heating at ATAL altitudes, with rates reaching up to 0.03 K day^{-1} across the study locations. However, heating rates for sulfate- and nitrate-dominant scenarios were approximately one-tenth of those observed under mixed-aerosol conditions, suggesting significantly weaker or negligible heating.

(iv) **Influence of the UTLS aerosol composition on the radiative forcing and heating rates:** To quantify the impact of aerosol composition on radiative forcing, we used the sulfate-dominant scenario as a reference. While replacing sulfates with nitrates led to minimal changes in radiative forcing, the inclusion of organic carbon and ammonium in mixed-aerosol compositions resulted in disproportionate increases in UTLS radiative forcing (up to 14-fold). However, in terms of total column atmospheric forcing, these changes were relatively modest, with a maximum reduction of ~5%, underscoring the localized nature of UTLS radiative effects. Heating rate variations followed a similar pattern, with mixed-aerosol scenarios exhibiting up to a 30-fold increase compared to sulfate-dominated conditions.

609   (v)   **Comparison with Spatially Averaged UTLS Heating Rates:** When comparing our

610   point-location heating rate estimates with spatially averaged heating rates over the

611   ASMA region (Santhosh et al., 2025), we found that mixed absorbing and scattering

612   aerosols produced a stronger regional warming effect, whereas purely scattering

613   aerosols (e.g., sulfates, nitrates) had a weaker impact. This suggests that regional-scale

614   radiative effects are more sensitive to variations in ATAL aerosol composition.

615   Although this study considered near-realistic aerosol compositions for the ATAL, the actual

616 chemical composition of UTLS aerosols remains a challenge due to spatial and temporal variability

617 (Hanumanthu et al., 2020). Observational datasets with altitude-resolved aerosol composition are

618 essential for improving radiative impact assessments. Additionally, while dust and black carbon

619 have been detected in the ATAL (Bossolasco et al., 2021; Ma et al., 2019), previous studies have

620 shown that dust has minimal impact on clear-sky shortwave heating rates (Gao et al., 2023), and

621 black carbon concentrations are modest in the ATAL, as indicated by recent in situ measurements

622 (Appel et al., 2022; Vernier et al., 2022). Therefore, these species were excluded from our analysis.

623   A significant limitation of the study is its reliance on shortwave radiative effects, as nitrate

624 and sulfate aerosols exhibit similar scattering properties across the shortwave spectrum. However,

625 nitrates have distinct absorption features in the thermal infrared, which could influence longwave

626 radiative forcing. Future studies should incorporate improved measurements in the longwave and

627 thermal infrared regions to assess the full radiative impact of nitrate aerosols. Additionally, given

628 the sensitivity of UTLS radiative effects to water vapor concentrations (Santhosh et al., 2024a),

629 further investigations are necessary to assess the coupled effects of aerosols and water vapor on

630 the UTLS radiative balance.

Given the geographic and temporal limitations of in-situ observations, an integrated approach combining satellite retrievals, reanalysis datasets, and in-situ measurements is crucial for tracking long-term trends in ATAL radiative forcing and heating rates. Ongoing efforts in this direction are expected to refine our understanding of the effects of UTLS aerosols. One of the key questions that remains unexplored is whether the ATAL aerosol's chemical composition has any role in strengthening or weakening the monsoon anticyclone. By modulating radiative heating, aerosols can influence the temperature gradient and stability of the upper troposphere, potentially altering the strength and persistence of the anticyclonic circulation. Finally, the second phase of BATAL, which commenced in August 2024, is anticipated to yield new insights into ATAL composition and radiative effects, particularly regarding the impact of wildfires and volcanic eruptions. These findings will be instrumental in refining the understanding of UTLS aerosol-radiation interactions.

Code/Data availability

The data collected from the BATAL campaigns is available on request.

Author contribution

VNS: Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Software, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. **BLM:** Conceptualization, Investigation, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing. **STA:** Data curation, Visualization, Writing – review & editing. **MVR:** Project administration, Resources, Writing – review & editing. **JPV:** Project administration, Resources, Writing – review & editing. **FGW:** Software, Writing – review & editing.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

The findings presented in this paper are derived from the ISRO-NASA joint BATAL campaign, which was supported by the National Atmospheric Research Laboratory (NARL) under the Department of Space (DoS) and NASA ROSES Upper Atmospheric Research Program and Atmospheric Composition Modeling and Analysis Program (UARP, ACMAP, UACO). We extend our gratitude and acknowledge Dr. Amit Kumar Pandit, National Institute of Aerospace, Hampton, USA, and other members from NARL Gadanki, TIFR Balloon Facility, Hyderabad, and BHU Varanasi for their active involvement in the BATAL project from Gadanki to Varanasi. We thank NASA's Earthdata team for providing free access to their MERRA-2, MODIS, MLS, and AIRS datasets, which were used as supportive data in this study. We also thank the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)'s Air Resources Laboratory (ARL) for their HYSPLIT software.

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