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Volume XVII (17)		APR 2026
CODEN: IJONS (95) (2026)	ISSUE 95	ISSN: 0976 - 0997

S. No	CONTENTS	Page No.
150	A Review on Parkinson’s Disease and their Molecular Pathology and Emerging Biomarkers Vishant Pal, Akash Kumar and Sachin	111125-111134
151	A Review on Evolution of Storage Architectures in Emerging Areas Anirban Lahiri, Sutapa Sarkar and Abhradip Chatterjee and Ayan Gan Gopadhyay	111135-111148
152	Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) : A Strategic Framework for Continuous Quality Enhancement and Regulatory Compliance in the Pharmaceutical Industry Gajawada Sowmya, Gurram Nikitha, Mavillapalli Saivennela and Sandala Anuradha Bai	111149-111157
153	Comparative Global Regulatory Pathways and the Emerging Role of Artificial Intelligence in Drug Approval and Regulatory Affairs P. Ashwin Raam Muthuvel, G. Nithish and G. Prakash Yoganandam	111158-111169
154	A Multilingual Patient - Doctor Monitoring and Dietary Intervention based on Artificial Intelligence R. Thamarai Selvi	111170-111178
155	Evaluation and Correlation of Morphometric Analysis of Pterygoid Plates with TMD’s Using CBCT Sushil K. Dokwal and Puneeta Vohra	111179-111187
156	An OCR - Free Unified Vision - Language Transformer for End-to-End Document Understanding and Structured Information Extraction Aarti Ahirwar and Ritu Tandon	111188-111206
157	Digital Tax Collection of Gram Panchayats Chandrashekar C and T. Shenbagavalli	111207-111216
158	Decadal Rise of Obesity in India: An Integrative Review of Epidemiological Trends and Ayurvedic <i>Sthaulya</i> Management Protocols Aastha Jain, Prashant Patil and Manjusha P	111217-111223
159	Extension of Intuitionistic - Closed Set using Local Difference Set S. Pavithra and G. Hari Siva Annam	111224-111228
160	Machine Learning for Fraud Detection in Blockchain Transaction Sumanth. S and Nagamani H. S	111229-111238
161	Comparative Profiling of Antibiotic Resistance in Pathogenic Bacteria Isolated From Diverse Aquatic Sources S. Praveen, S. Manoj, R. Yuvaraj, M. Suriyan and V. Padmavathi	111239-111246
162	Role of Spider Silk in Biomedical and Tissue Engineering : A Glimpse Subhasis Nath, Sourav Debnath, Sujan Krishna Samanta and Soumya Mukherjee	111247-111257
163	Smart Chaperone for Visually Impaired Using YOLOv5 and HC-SR04 Sensors Rajalakshmi S, S. Angel Deborah and Nandini Sree R. R	111258-111265

164	Impact of High -Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) on VO ₂ Max and Endurance Capacity in Young Adults : A Systematic Review and Meta - Analysis Mohd Sartaz and Sandeep Kumar	111266-111279
165	A New Era of Medicine: Wireless Drug Delivery System Ramesh Kumari Dasgupta, Pabitra Maity, Nilesh Kumar Paul, Manami Sardar, Payel Mondal and Soumili Ghosh	111280-111287
166	Medical Diagnosis Strategic Decision Making Using Dominance Analysis with Reverse Order Fuzzy Numbers in Matrix Games Monisha .M and S.Akila	111288-111292
167	Some Necessary Conditions for a Graph to be One Modulo N Mean Graph K. Bhagyasri and D. Muthuramakrishnan	111293-111307
168	Social, Economical and Psychological Trammel to the Burgeoning of Damsel using Topsis with Attributed Values Determined as Interval R.Saarumathi	111308-111315
169	Patterns and Trends in Open Access Scholarly Publications from India: A Scopus - Based Analysis V.K.Varsha and S. Srinivasaragavan	111316-111325
170	Homoeopathic Management of Psoriasis: Case Report with PASI - Based Clinical Evaluation Amit Nayak, Heena Rawal, Poorav Desai and Amit Kumar Arya	111326-111330
171	Medical Decision Support Framework for Obesity Diagnosis Using Intuitionistic Fuzzy HyperSoft Set Based Multiple Attribute Group Decision-Making S.T.Pugazhoviyam and S.Akila	111331-111342
172	Integrating Pharmacovigilance into Traditional Medicine Systems : Ensuring Safety and Rational Use Lowkika Bandarupalli , Gnana Pradeepika Ravulapalli , Srujika Varma Kosuri , Nikhila Elamarthi , Bala Saraswathi Nadendla , Pavan Kumar Yanamadala and Rama Rao Nadendla	111343-111354
173	Lung Cancer Classification from CT Images using Hybrid CNN-Vision Transformer Network K.Sharmila, K. Saminathan and M. Chithra Devi	111355-111365
174	Data - Driven Drug Design: Transforming Target Identification to Lead Optimization through Artificial Intelligence Swarnendu Kundu, Sagar Chowhan, Tannu Priya, Jit Das, Sayantika Sarkar and Paramita Ganguly	111366-111383
175	Development of a Stability - Indicating RP- HPLC Analytical Method for Estimation of Stavudine in Bulk and Dosage Forms Palhya. Bansilal, Samala. Rajitha, Domakonda. Supraja, Palle.Vani and Gadde. Sammaiah	111384-111390
176	A Novel, Precise, and Accurate UPLC Method for Concurrent Analysis of Xanomeline and Tropicium Chloride Kodi Mallika and G.Somasekhar	111391-111413
177	The Evolving Landscape of Clinical Research Organizations: Trends, Economics, and the Transformative Potential of Integrated Translational Pharmaceuticals – A Comparative Analysis with Veridian Research Akash Bararia, Sayanti Shom, Debjit Dhar Chowdhury and Debasis Das	111414-111423

178	Emerging Trends in Pharmaceutical Analysis : Techniques and Applications Pooja Chafale and Hiralben Mehta	111424-111433
179	SEM – EDS - Based Elemental Screening of Lignocellulosic Biomass for the Sustainable Synthesis of 5-Hydroxymethylfurfural and 2, 5-Dimethylfuran Jigesh P Mehta, Anand V Metre, Mathurkumar S Bhakhar and Dharmesh V Kapatel	111434-111440
180	Isolation, Identification and Molecular Characterisation of Potential Petroleum - Degrading Bacteria from Oil - Contaminated Ecosystems A. Ch. Pradyutha, Prathibha Sphoorthi , Deshagoni Pravalika G. Spanditha Reddy and Sabitha Yadam	111441-111449
181	Artificial Intelligence as an Integrative Platform for the Detection and Diagnosis of Genetic Abnormalities Ramesh Kumari Dasgupta, Payel Mondal, Soumili Ghosh and Priti Bhunia	111450-111461
182	A Study on Algebraic Properties of Defensive Alliance Adjacency Matrix in Graphs N. Sudha ¹ and V. Mohanaselvi	111462-111470
183	Comparative Studies on Isolation, Identification, Characterization of Methanogenic Bacteria and Production of Biogas from Cattle Dung Guntheti G D D Sree Vajran, M.Lashmeetha Manaswini and Pullettikurthi Lokeshwari, N.Prathusha, Nikitha Narayanan and D. Metilda Rosalin	111471-111487
184	Levodopa – Carbidopa Therapy for Parkinson’s Disease: Pharmacokinetic Rationale, Clinical Efficacy, and Limitations Vinita Vikas Alman, Vikas R. Dhole, Sanganna C. Burali and Prashant S. Kumbhar	111488-111498
185	Design, Development and Characterization of Polyherbal Tablets to Treat Iron Deficiency Anemia Kummara Indralekha, V. Pallavi, Ramarao Nadendla and G.V. Rami Reddy	111499-111509
186	Target - Based Approaches of CRISPR–Cas9 in the Treatment of Blood Cancer Surjya Bhattacharjee, Asim Roy, Md.Rakibuddin and Kausik Bhar	111510-111523
187	Enhancing Network Lifetime by Optimized Resource Allocation and Scheduling to Reduce Redundancy in DSR Protocol for Wireless Ad Hoc Networks Monojit Manna, Somrita Jana, Debraj Roy , Mehbub Rahaman Mondal, Ditu Barui and Aditi Sinha	111524-111540
188	Targeted Colon Delivery of Hesperetin: Emerging Strategies Therapeutic Potential and Formulation Challenges Kousik Mahanti and Shaikh Ershadul Haque	111541-111553
189	Continuous Performance Monitoring of Python-Based IoT Applications Using Lightweight APM D.Akilandeswari and B.Preetha	111554-111561
190	Development and Validation of Bioanalytical Lc/Ms/ Ms Method for Determination of Eltrombopag in Human Plasma using Eltrombopag 13C ₄ Roshappagari Bharathi and P.Sathya Sowmya	111562-111578
191	<i>Nymphaea alba</i> : A Traditional Nutraceutical Plant to Therapeutic Insights Ananya Bhowmick, Priti Bhunia, Shubhadeep Hazra, Tannupriya Sharma, Ramesh Kumari Dasgupta and Souvik Roy	111579-111595

192	Empowering Medical Imaging with Artificial Intelligence: A Review of Deep Learning Approaches for Tumor Detection in Magnetic Resonance Imaging S. Ambika	111596-111602
193	Unveiling the Therapeutic Spectrum of <i>Hyptis suaveolens</i> : Phytochemical and Pharmacological Insights A.Neha Saisri, Ch.Venkata Prasanna Lakshmi, Rama Rao Nadendla, Potluri Srilakshmi, Yarlagadda Sri Swathi and Bolisetty Padmavathi	111603-111612
194	A Detailed Review of Highly Medicinal Plant: <i>Datura metel</i> Mriganka Karmakar and Kausik Bhar	111613-111631
195	Design and Implementation of a Secure IoT – RFID Attendance Monitoring Framework for Smart Colleges B. Rex Cyril	111632-111644
196	Air Quality Prediction Using Deep Learning Techniques in Perambalur and Ariyalur District M. Natarajan and S. Saminathan	111645-111651
197	<i>Combretum indicum</i> Plant - Driven Synthesis of Silver Nanoparticles : A Sustainable Approach for Biological Applications Suraj Adole, Vivek Jedhe, Pallavi Pantawane and Bhuvaneshwari Mehere	111652-111667
198	Smart Interference Discovery in MANETs Using Deep Learning Techniques A.Saraswathi and N. Senthilkumar	111668-111675
199	A Review on Gravitational Effects on Cerebral Perfusion: Bridging Ancient Headstand Practices with Modern Cerebral Flow Monitoring Kanha Garg, Nisha Verma, Tirthankar Choudhury and Baisnab Das Pathak	111676-111687
200	Efficacy of Triphala Yonidhavana in the Management of Bacterial Vaginosis: A Pilot Randomized Controlled Clinical Study Thulasi VS and Manjusha Karkare	111688-111691
201	IoT-Based Edge-Cloud System for Energy-Efficient Environmental Sensing S Selvakumari and A Thomas Felix	111692-111702
202	Management of Intraoral Hemangioma in Pediatric Sturge – Weber Syndrome using Sclerotherapy: A Case Report and Literature Review" Bhawna Saini, Puneeta Vohra, Kajal Malhotra, Indrani Borah, Sumridhi Aggarwal and Komal Sharma	111703-111708
203	Global Burden of Helminthiases and the Therapeutic Potential of Zingiberaceae Family Plants Ramesh Kumari Dasgupta, Bidisa Maji, Sahil Sardar, Pabitra Maity, Nilesh Kumar Paul, Sougata Kumar Mondal, Moumita Singha , Manami Sardar and Pabitra Maity	111709-111715
204	The Flipped Research Model : Re-Designing Grammar Learning for Multilingual Classrooms in India Nusrat Jahan and Ashok Pandya	111716-111730
205	Smart Analytics: Predicting Student Success with Machine Learning A. Manikandan	111731-111740
206	Effect of Rasna Liquid Orally Consumed on the Corrosion Protection of Orthodontic Arch Wire Made of SS 18/8 Alloy in Presence of Artificial Salivary Environment C. Jane Amala Priya, R. Betsy Clarebel, S. Joseph Selvaraj and A. Peter Pascal Regis	111741-111748
207	Incorporating Prebiotics into Daily Life: Diet, Supplements and Recipes Pallab Sarkar, Sadab Aftab and Subarna Mahanti	111749-111768

208	Investment Decision - Making among Women Entrepreneurs : An Economic and Behavioral Analysis Kekhronei O Koza and I. Ravi	111769-111776
209	Next-Gen Cloud Migration: Effortless Transformation for Modern Workloads K. Sekar, R. Christy Pushpaleela, Viswanathan Kolanchinathan and Ganesan Muthusamy	111777-111788
210	Peptidomimetics as a Therapeutic Strategy for Targeting Protein-Protein Interactions in Cancer: A Comprehensive Review with Clinical Translation Insights Ipsita pramanik, Shaikh Ershadul Haque, Sayan Kayal and Kritika Maity	111789-111796
211	Nanotechnology - Enabled Delivery of Phytochemicals for Cancer Therapy : Current Status and Challenges Shaikh Ershadul Haque, Kritika Maity, Sayan Kayal and Ipsita Pramanik	111797-111808
212	Characterization of Phytoconstituent Derived from <i>Trametes versicolor</i> and Evaluation of Biological Activity Sipra Sarkar Banerjee, Animesh Maity, Sumit Mallick and Soumyadip Patra	111809-111815
213	Special Constraints on K-Odd Sequential Harmonious Labeling of Graphs D. Muthuramakrishnan and C. Sheela	111816-111824
214	Higher Educational Attainment as a Determinant of Socio - Economic Status: An Economic Assessment of Tribal Women in West Garo Hills District in Meghalaya Jayashree Hajong and R. Baby Bowna	111825-111843
215	Targeting NSCLC: Natural Compounds and Integrative Oncology Ramesh Kumari Dasgupta Pabitra Maity, Payel Mondal, Soumili Ghosh Moumita Singha, Nilesh Kumar Paul and Manami Sardar	111844-111853
216	A Study on Odd (Even) Sum Eccentricity Domination in Graphs with Algorithm D. Ilakkiya and V. Mohana Selvi	111854-111864
217	A Study on the Labelling of Intuitionistic Fuzzy Graphs and their Structural Properties K. Dharmaraj, S. Chandrasekaran, M. Sumathi and A. Rajkumar	111865-111870
218	Influence of Starch Microstructure on Compressibility, Disintegration, and Drug Release Surajeet Manna, Shreyangsu Modak, Habibulla Molla, Saptarshi Samajdar	111871-111892
219	Cost Optimization in Inventory Model with Partial Prepayment Scheme via Digital Ordering System S. Jerinrechal and I. Antonitte Vinoline	111893-111900
220	Performance Improvement of Vapor Compression Refrigeration System - A Comprehensive Study Digvijaysinh R Chavda, Virang H Oza, Vipul M Patel, Bhavin G Chavda and Maharshi P Kotak	111901-111913
221	Advancing Molecular Diagnostics and Personalized Chemotherapeutic Strategies in Neuro-Oncology Arijit Seal, Soumyadip Patra, Dhrubojyoti Sen, Arpita Biswas, Debanjan Nath, Durgesh Ranjan Kar and Subhajit Sarkar	111914-111925
222	Therapeutic Role of Agnikarma in Vata - Pradhana Vatavyadhi with Special Reference to Gridhrasi : A Single Case Report Bhoomi Soni, Hemanth Toshikhane and Ankit Tyagi	111926-111931

223	The Impact of Quality Sleep on the Academic Performance and Quality of Life of Students in an Integrated Allied Health Science College of North Kerala Santheep .S, Gladies Kamalam .S, Jisha P. Velmurugan .G and Manivannan .S	111932-111937
224	An Innovative Formulation and Evaluation of Super Disintegrating Tea Tablet Debasish Bhattacharya, Baisnabdas Pathak, Tirthankar Choudhury, Hritweek Shee, Santanu Mal and Soumyadip Hazra	111938-111951
225	A Study on Cloud- Based Regulatory Information Management Systems in Pharmaceutical Industry Venkata Sai Manikanta Thota and Y. Koushik	111952-111962
226	Novel Isatin Derivatives as Antidiabetic Agent : A Synthesis, Network Pharmacology and Virtual Screening based Study to Explore the Pharmacological Mechanism Manami Sardar, Prasenjit Mondal, Teasha Chakrabarty, Saptarshi Samajdar	111963-111975
227	Role of Genomics and Precision Medicine in Ischemic Heart Disease - A Review Vasantha. G and M. Indhu	111976-111981
228	A Cross - Sectional Study Protocol for the Hindi Translation, Validation, and Test-Retest Reliability of the Trunk Impairment Scale 2.0 (TIS 2.0) in Stroke Patients Ruchika, Subhasish Chatterjee, Mousumi Saha, Abhishek Mandal and Suman Pradhan	111982-111989
229	Formulation, Development and Evaluation of Antifungal Cream Formulated with Clove Oil and Citronella Oil Using Box-Behnken Design Mohammad. Mustaq	111990-112000
230	From Chemical Synthesis to Clinical Field: A Comprehensive Review of Paracetamol Tuhin Sinha, Santi Saha, Rohan Kumar Karan, Protyush Goswami, Dhiman Pradhan and Rahit Paul,	112001-112013
231	Phytochemical Profile and Antibacterial Activity of <i>Senna auriculata</i> (L.) Roxb. against the Selected Clinical Isolates Jenisha J, Irene Wilsy J and Reginald Appavoo M	112014-112018
232	Assessment of Glyphosate Application Practices and Residue Levels in Agricultural Fields of Mysore District, India Yogesh .P, Bharath .M, Yashvanth .M, Vadiraj K.T and Raju N.S	112019-112029
233	Nanoscale Gene Modulation Approaches for Metabolic Reprogramming in Diabetes Debarpan Pal, Sayan Das, Nancy Jain, Taniya Biswas, Tirthankar Choudhury, Baisnab Das Pathak, Vijeta Bhattacharya and Reeta Shakya	112030-112046
234	Digital Financial Inclusion and MSME Growth in India: A Technology - Driven Sustainability Approach Deepak D, Purushotham H C, Arun R and Muralidhar L B	112047-112057
235	Ayurvedic Management of Prameha by Vasantika Vaman Karma W.S.R. Diabetes Mellitus Nehal Patel, Dharmik Dave, Archit Adhvaryu and Rohini Salve	112058-112066
236	Computational Docking Strategies for Targeted Anti - Cancer Therapeutics M. Lakshmi Madhuri, M. Ganga Raju, K. Sai Abhinav Varma, A. Sahithi, M. Vydhik and M. Sahith Yadav	112067-112076

237	Exploring the Neuroprotective Role of Obacunone in the Management of Multiple Sclerosis: A Network Pharmacology Approach Moutrisha Das, Shristy Kumari, Tabrej Alam, Sanjana Singha, Abir Haldar, Poulami Sasmal, Sanket Seksaria and Suravi Saha	112077-112087
238	Experimental Investigation of Workability, Compressive Strength, Flexural Strength, and Splitting Tensile Strength of Green Concrete Incorporating Glass Waste and Recycled Aggregates Arindam Debnath, Mukul Chandra Bora, Partha Protim Borthakur and Pranjal Sarmah	112088-112100
239	Breast Size as a Factor in Musculoskeletal Pain and Postural Changes in the Neck and Shoulder among Adult Females: A Cross-Sectional Study Nijalkumari M. Parmar and Minal Mirza	112101-112108
240	Development and Optimization of a Polyherbal Transethosomal Gel for Improved Diabetic Wound Healing Nitin Mittal, Jahnavi Tomar, Anjali Ojha, Tirthankar Choudhury, Baisnab Das Pathak and Vijeta Bhattacharya	112109-112115

Editorial



The declaration of 2026 as the **International Year of the Woman Farmer (IYWF)** by the United Nations marks a historic recognition of women as the backbone of global agrifood systems under the theme “Empowered women, transforming agrifood systems.” This global observance seeks to correct a long-standing invisibility: while women constitute nearly 40–43% of the global agricultural labour force and in many developing regions produce up to 50–80% of food, their contributions remain undervalued, underpaid and under-recorded. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) highlights those empowering women farmers—through equal access to land, credit, technology and education—could increase agricultural productivity by 20–30% and significantly reduce global hunger. In the contemporary global food economy, where nearly 28% of the population still faces moderate or severe food insecurity, women farmers are not merely participants but crucial agents of resilience, sustainability and nutritional security.

In India, the story of women farmers reflects both extraordinary contribution and structural inequality. Agriculture has undergone a visible “feminization,” with women forming over 42% of the agricultural workforce and, in some estimates, contributing over 60% of total agricultural labour participation. Around 80% of rural women are engaged in agriculture, managing farms, livestock, fisheries and allied sectors, especially as male migration increases. Yet this dedication contrasts sharply with ownership realities: barely 8–14% of women own agricultural land, revealing a deep gender gap in access to productive assets. This “80–8 gap” symbolizes the paradox of Indian agriculture—women do the work but lack recognition, decision-making power and institutional support.

Women farmers play a decisive role in quality food production and agro-economy by ensuring crop diversity, seed preservation, nutrition-sensitive agriculture and household food security. They are central to family farming systems, often integrating crop cultivation with livestock, kitchen gardens and local food traditions, thereby sustaining rural livelihoods and community nutrition. At the grassroots level, women-led self-help groups and cooperatives strengthen community food production systems, local markets and value chains, making agriculture more inclusive and resilient. Their contribution extends to agricultural research and innovation, particularly in indigenous knowledge systems, organic farming, millet revival and sustainable practices that enhance soil health and biodiversity.

Importantly, women farmers are emerging as key actors in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Evidence shows that women-led farming initiatives promote climate-resilient crops, water conservation, agroforestry and low-input sustainable agriculture, thereby strengthening ecological balance and food security. Their intimate knowledge of local ecosystems enables them to adapt quickly to climate variability, making them indispensable to future agrifood transformations.

However, despite their indispensable role, women farmers continue to face systemic challenges: limited access to land rights, credit, insurance, technology, extension services and market linkages; wage disparities; heavy unpaid labour burdens; and exclusion from policy-making and institutional frameworks. These constraints not only undermine gender justice but also restrict the full potential of global agriculture.

Thus, the International Year of the Woman Farmer (2026) is not merely symbolic—it is a call for structural transformation. Because agriculture cannot be complete without women. Recognizing and empowering women farmers is essential for building equitable, sustainable and climate-resilient agrifood systems. When women progress, agriculture advances; and when agriculture prospers, society as a whole flourishes—this is certain. As the theme suggests, when women are empowered, they do not just cultivate crops—they transform economies, communities and the very future of food security worldwide.

Let us honor women farmers!

Let us protect and preserve our proud agriculture!

S. Vijikumar
Editor in Chief
IJONS

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