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# IMPORTANCE & APPLICATIONS OF **NANOTECHNOLOGY**

# A Review on Nanoparticles Based Biosensors for Pesticide Detection in Water

Tarini Vohra<sup>1</sup>; Hardik Grover<sup>1</sup>; Shagun Saxena<sup>1</sup>; Devendra Kumar Verma<sup>2</sup>; Rashmi Rameshwari<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Biotechnology, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad-121001, Haryana, India.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Chemistry, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi (South Campus), Delhi-110021, India.

## Corresponding Author: Rashmi Rameshwari

Department of Biotechnology, Manav Rachna International Institute of Research and Studies, Faridabad-121001, Haryana, India  
Tel: 9810039850; Email: rashmi.fet@mriu.edu.in

## Abstract

Pesticides are chemical compounds that are employed to eliminate, repel, or control certain forms of plant or animal life that are deemed as pests. Usage of pesticides enhances the crop yield, but they are potentially hazardous to humans, animals, and the environment. Toxicity of pesticides including insecticides, fungicides can result in diseases such as nausea, dizziness, vomiting, abdominal muscle cramps, muscle twitching, tremors, weakness or loss of coordination; making their detection the need of the hour. Conventional techniques including mass spectrometry and gas chromatography suffer from limitations such as operational complexities, requirement of sophisticated instruments and issues related to portability. High sensitivity and stability of nanomaterials based biosensors makes them suitable candidates for on-site detection of pesticides. This report reviews different biosensors that have been employed for detection of pesticides, laying down their specific limitations. It also discusses the need to develop alternate nanoparticle based sensors with high specificity, sensitivity and capability of on-site analysis.

Published Online: Sep 14, 2020

eBook: Importance & Applications of Nanotechnology

Publisher: MedDocs Publishers LLC

Online edition: <http://meddocsonline.org/>

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**Keywords:** Pesticides; Nanotechnology; Nanoparticles.

## Introduction

The combat mode of pesticides has not only proven fatal to pests but their harmful elements are gradually decimating the health of all living beings including humans through the fundamental intakes. The term pesticide includes a diverse range of compounds such as insecticides, fungicides, rodenticides, herbicides, molluscicides, nematocides and plant growth regulators [1]. The origination of synthetic insecticides-organophosphates (OP) in 1960s, carbamates in 1970s and pyrethroids in 1980s along with the initiation of use of herbicides and fungicides in the 1970s-1980s era has contributed immensely to pest control and agricultural output but has simultaneously created havoc in the life of other living organisms including humans. The amount of risk associated with a pesticide depends on the amount of exposure and the toxicity of the ingredients. Pesticides cause acute exposure effects such as dyspnea, pulmonary edema, and eye and skin irritation. Chronic exposure effects include car-

cinogenesis, mutagenesis, pre- and postnatal damage and reproductive system damage [1]. Organochlorine compounds (OC compounds) can damage tissues of essentially every life form on this planet, such as the fish that live in water bodies and the birds that feed on these aquatic life forms. Ideally a pesticide must be fatal to the target pests, but not to non-target species, including humans. However, the increasing usage of pesticides to increase crop yield has persistently affected human health, thus surfacing the controversy on the use of pesticides.

Prompt, on site and accurate analysis of pesticides is important due to their increasing use to improve crop yield and their consequent health effects. Sophisticated techniques such as gas chromatography [2-4], liquid chromatography-mass spectrometry [5] have been used for analysis. However, these techniques are laborious, require sophisticated instruments and trained



personnel for operation. Moreover, they lack the capability of onsite/in-situ application and multiple sample analysis. Bio-sensing of pesticides using enzymatic, catalytic or immunological sensors [6,7] has helped in overcoming the limitations of conventional techniques opening a new arena in pesticide detection.

Whole cell biosensors based on various amperometric [6], conductometric [8] and potentiometric [9] detection techniques have also been employed for pesticide detection. However, low specificity and narrow detection range of biosensors has led to research on novel detection methods based on nanoparticles. Over a period of time, we have observed increasing synergy between nanotechnology and biosensors which has been utilized owing to their ability in recognizing threat agents in real time as also performing detection with high sensitivity and selectivity. Nanoparticles based on silver, gold, titanium and other materials (like CdS-decorated graphene nanocomposite and TiO<sub>2</sub> decorated graphene) have been used for detection of several small molecules including pesticides [10]. Nanoparticle based sensors have been used for detection of wide variety of pesticides including organophosphate pesticides like malathion [11] and rhodamine [12] herbicides like simazine [13] and insecticides like monocrotophos [14], paraoxon [15], methyl parathion [16], phoxim and carbofuran [17] in water, food and soil. However, cost of production, facileness of sensor fabrication techniques and the dependability for trace level detection of pesticides are some concerns of nanoparticles based sensors. Hence, research efforts have been directed towards designing efficient biosensors based on nanomaterials that display high sensitivity and stability.

Gold nanoparticles (AuNP) absorb and scatter light strongly at their Surface Plasmon Resonance (SPR) wavelength region and this property of AuNPs makes them one of the most valuable optical probes for applications that involve sensing. The intense absorption or scattering of AuNPs at the visible light region makes them easily discernible by the naked eye or detectable by affordable instruments. This localized SPR property of the nanoparticles enables identification of pesticides at very low concentrations and conserves the sensor activity up to a large extent with a great storage shelf life. This report focuses on different biosensors available for pesticide detection, their limitations and explores the possible use of gold nanoparticles, aptamers, Molecularly Imprinted Polymers (MIPs), and Artificial Neural Networks (ANNs) based biosensors for cheaper, sensitive and in-situ detection of pesticides in water.

### Pesticides and their health effects

Pesticides are substances which intend to mitigate, destroy, repel, or prevent any type of pest. It includes a variety of compounds including herbicides, insecticides, antimicrobials, and bug repellents. Defoliant, plant growth regulators and nitrogen stabilizers are also pesticides. All pesticides have some risk and the amount of risk depends upon the amount of exposure along with toxicity of ingredients. All categories of pesticide increase crop yield by inhibiting growth of pests or unwanted organism, but at the same time pose a great deal of harm to human health.

Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (i.e., DDT) is the most popular organochlorine pesticide that has raised many environmental and human health issues due to its uncontrollable use [18-20]. In-utero exposure to DDT and DDE both has been

confirmed to cause neurodevelopment disorders in children. Health effects, such as endocrine disorders [21,22] effects on foetal developments, hepatic alterations and metabolism of lipids have also been associated with excessive use of these chemicals. Chemicals such as organophosphates majorly found in pesticides leads to acute, long term poisoning of human system and neurotoxicity which all are result of inhalation, ingestion, skin or eye contact, and with regular or daily exposure to OPs. Certain reproductive effects (such as birth effects, hostile uterus, pre-term delivery), psychological effects (nervousness, irritation, insomnia) and the chronic neurotoxic effects (delayed organophosphate induced polyneuropathy, Alzheimer disease, attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder in children) can potentially be caused due to OPs. Therefore, spotlight on OP turns out to be essential for health protection.

Carbamate also a class of popular chemicals, have the ability to cause cytotoxicity and genotoxicity and to induce necrosis in human immune cells [23] natural killer cells [24,25] and also apoptosis in T lymphocytes [26].

Atrazine is a potential endocrine disrupter and according to research, it interferes and alters the levels of key hormones in rats and cause delayed puberty. Rhodamine causes nasal itch and burn, chest pains, excessive tearing of eyes. Acute exposure to this chemical may even cause transient mucous membrane and skin irritation without evidence.

### Conventional strategies for pesticide detection

The detrimental effects of pesticide residues on human health, led to development of techniques that could sense and detect pesticide in various items that were being consumed by humans including food and water. Conventional techniques used for pesticide detection included liquid/gas chromatography [2-4,27], High Performance Liquid Chromatography (HPLC) and mass spectroscopy [5]. However, these techniques were limited by use of sophisticated instruments, need of a trained personnel for operation, tedious pre-treatments of the sample. Moreover, involvement of large time spans, high cost and unsuitability for multiple sample analysis resulted in exploring biosensors for pesticide detection.

Biosensors offer highly sensitive, specific, cost effective and rapid real-time detection of pesticides. Moreover, the developed biosensors are re-usable and allow in-situ monitoring of the trace amounts of pesticide. Different categories of biosensors including enzymatic, whole cell, immunosensors and DNA based biosensors have been successfully developed for pesticide detection. Different biosensors developed have been summarized in the following sections.

### Enzymatic biosensors

Enzymatic biosensors are based on the effect of pesticide on the enzymatic activities in the organism that is affected by it. Effect of pesticides is often observed either by inhibition of enzyme activity and thus the products formed (Inhibition based enzymatic biosensors) or in terms of enzymes acting as catalyst (for eg. release of protons or formation of chromophoric/electro-active substance) which are present in sufficient quantities to be detected (Catalytic enzymatic biosensors). Various pesticides that have been detected using the two mechanisms of enzymatic biosensors along with the enzyme involved have been listed in **Table 1**.

**Table 1:** Enzymatic Biosensors.

Principle of operation of biosensor	Enzyme utilized	Pesticides detected	References
Inhibition based biosensors	Cholinesterase	Organophosphates and carbamates	[28]
	Tyrosinase	Carbamates and atrazine	[29]
	Peroxidase	Thiodicarb ( a carbamate)	[30]
	Alkaline phosphatase	Organochlorine and paraoxon	[31]
	Acid phosphatase	Thiodicarb ( a carbamate)	[32]
Catalytic biosensors	Organophosphorus Hydrolase	Organophosphorus (parathion, paraoxon)	Chen et al., 2010, Lee et al., 2010
	Glutathione-s-transferase	Atrazine	Andreou et al., 2002

However, since there are multiple impurities beyond pesticides that include heavy metals and detergents that also affect the enzyme functioning that's why these sensors can't give the proper qualitative and quantitative measure of the analyte present as in AChE. There is a certain extent up to which the enzyme affects which is not revealed by these biosensors. In case of inhibition based sensors there is limited range.

### Whole cell biosensors

Whole cell biosensors require cell as an immobilizing element during the detection process during transduction. The categorization of these biosensors is done on the basis of the type of cell being used which includes microbial and plant cells. Whole cell biosensors are based on various transduction schemes such as amperometric, potentiometric & conductometric. **Table 2** summarizes different whole cell biosensors that have been employed for detection of pesticides. Despite the wide range of applications of whole cell biosensors, the market value of these biosensors is reduced due to nonspecific reactions leading to low selectivity and slow response as the products need to diffuse through cell wall to produce a detectable signal [33].

### Immunosensors

Antigen antibody interaction marks the basis of forming an immunosensor. The antibodies are immobilized on a substrate and they interact with the antigen forming a complex. Changes in optical and electrochemical aspects of the complex formed is instrumental in detection process. For an ideal immunosensor, it should possess quality of detecting and quantifying the antibodies in real samples. Several immunosensors developed for pesticide detection based on different transduction methods are listed below in **Table 3**.

Applicability of immunosensors is limited, as they require cumbersome processes of producing monoclonal antibodies are costly and time consuming. Moreover, immunosensors are also associated with complexities in the form of animal care to generate monoclonal antibodies limiting their application.

**Table 2:** Whole cell biosensors used for pesticide detection.

Type of biosensor	Recognition microorganism	Pesticide detected	Reference
Microbial biosensors	<i>E. Coli</i>	Organophosphates	[34]
	<i>Arthrobacter</i> , <i>Flavobacterium</i> and <i>Pseudomonas putida</i>	Organophosphates	[35,36]
Plant tissue and photosynthesis based biosensors	<i>Chlorella vulgaris</i> (Plant tissue based)	Alkaline phosphatase linked pesticides	[37,38]
	<i>Dictyosphaeriumchlorelloides</i> , <i>Scenedesmusintermedius</i> (Photosynthesis based)	Simazine and herbicides	[39-42]

### DNA Biosensors

DNA biosensors are recognized by the molecule of DNA that is immobilized on the electrode. The changes in redox properties of the DNA form the basis of the sensing abilities of these sensors. Pesticides including atrazine, 2, 4-Dglufosinate ammonium, carbofuran, paraoxon-ethyl and difluorobenzuron have been detected using DNA biosensors [51]. These biosensors generally lack selectivity and further cost and reusability issues limit them.

### Nanoparticles based biosensors for pesticide detection

Use of nanomaterials in sensors allows the use of many new signal transduction technologies in their manufacture. Nanosensors, nanoprobess and other nanosystems are radically transforming the fields of environmental analysis in lieu of their size. The immobilization of nanomaterials onto sensing devices generates novel interfaces that enable the sensitive optical or electro- chemical detection of analytes. Table 4 below lists various nanoparticle-based biosensors that have been designed for detection of pesticides. Within the group of noble metal nanoparticles, gold nanoparticles are mostly used for biosensor application due to their biocompatibility, optical and electronic properties, and relatively simple production and modification. These magnificent properties of gold nanoparticles have made them rising candidates not only for bio-analytics but for various other research fields.

Application domain of nanomaterials based sensing for pesticide residue detection is vast, nevertheless some issues such as availability of the nanomaterials sensitive to common pesticide residues, ease of sensor fabrication techniques and instrumentation, desired reliability and repeatability in trace level detection, cost and issues related to nanomaterial exposure to the surrounding environment need to be considered [52].

**Table 3:** Immunosensors for pesticide detection.

Type of biosensor	Method of transduction	Pesticide detected	Reference
Electrochemical	Amperometric	2,4-Dichlorophenoxy acetic acid	[6]
		Atrazine	[7]
	Conductometric	Atrazine	[8]
	Potentiometric	Terbutylazine (tba)	[9]
	Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy	Atrazine	[43]
2,4-Dichlorophenoxy acetic acid		[43]	
Optical	Surface plasmon resonance	DDT, Chlorpyrifos and Carbaryl.	[44]
	Fluorescence polarisation	Atrazine	[45]
	Total internal reflection fluorescence (TIRF)	Atrazine, simazine and alachlor	[46]
	Polarisation-modulation infrared reflection-absorption spectroscopy (PM-IRRAS)	Atrazine	[47]
Piezoelectric immunosensors		Clorpyrifos, Triclopyr	[48]
Mechanical Immunosensors		Atrazine	[48,49]
		DDT	[50]
		2,4-Di chlorophenoxy acetic acid	[48]

**Table 4:** Gold Nanoparticles based biosensors for detection of pesticides.

Type of material	Pesticide detected	Detection limit	Principle of detection	Reference
Gold nanoparticles (AuNP)	Herbicide simazine	0.013 $\mu\text{M}$	Electrochemical	[13]
	Organophosphate pesticides	35 ppb	Colorimetric	[53]
	Methyl parathion	0.07 ppb	Electrochemical	[54]
	Methyl Paraoxon Carbofuran Phoxim	$2 \times 10^{-11} \text{M}$ $1 \times 10^{-10} \text{M}$ $2 \times 10^{-9} \text{M}$	Amperometric	[17]
	Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT)	27 ng/mL	Dipstick immunoassay	[55]
	Paraoxon	12 $\mu\text{g/L}$	Electrochemical	[15]
	Paraoxon Carbofuran	$1 \times 10^{-4} \mu\text{M}$ $1 \times 10^{-5} \mu\text{M}$	Amperometric	Sirvent et al., 2001
Gold nanoparticles/ dragon fly arrays	Rhodamine	$10^{-8} \text{M}$	Surface Enhanced Raman Spectroscopy (SERS)	[12]
$\text{Fe}_3\text{O}_4$ functionalized grapheme oxide – AuNP	Catechol Hydroquinone	0.8 $\mu\text{M}$ 1.1 $\mu\text{M}$	Electrochemical	[56]
4-amini-3-mercaptobenzoic acid functionalized AuNP	Cyhalothrin	0.75 $\mu\text{M}$	Colorimetric	[57]
Au-Na dodecylbenzene sulphonate nanoparticles	Methyl parathion	$8.6 \times 10^{-8} \text{mol/L}$	Electrochemical	[16]
CdTe quantum dots/ AuNPs	Monocrotophos	1.34 $\mu\text{M}$	Amperometric	[14]
Aptamers based nanoprobos	Malathion	1.94 pM	Optical	[11]
	Acetamidiprid	3.2 nmole/L	Optical and electrochemical	[58]

Various detection mechanisms have been employed in the development of biosensors for the estimation of pesticides up to miniscule levels.

### New trends in biosensors

The new trends in the biosensor offer advantage over the conventional types of biosensors. These include:

#### Aptamers

The nucleic acid sequences that bind to the analyte not necessarily a Nucleic Acid is known as an Aptamer. SELEX (Selection Evolution of Ligands by EXponential enrichment) is the technique used for designing these aptamers specific to a particular analyte.

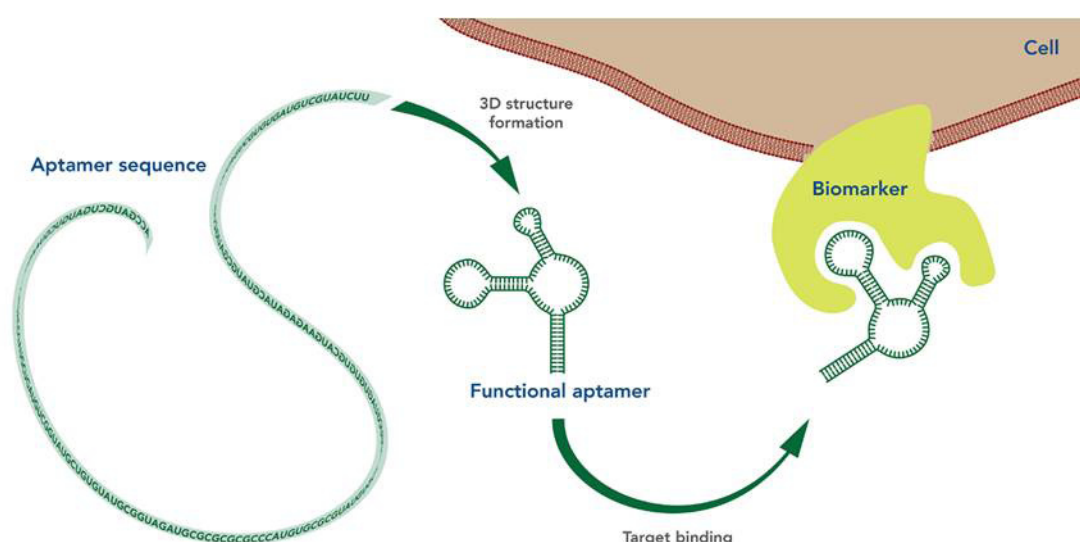
These aptamers have wide range of detection abilities including metal ions, microbes, proteins and so on. They offer more stability than the antibodies used in the immunosensors as they can be used under extreme conditions they offer modifications without any compromise to their activity [59-63]. Less batch to batch variation while production makes them a good candidate for organophosphate detection [28].

Further, these aptamers are use in various fields of medical diagnosis, bioimaging, drug delivery and therapy, environmental toxicity testing as biomaterials.

**Table 5:** Aptamers based biosensors for detection of pesticides.

Type of material	Pesticide detected	Detection limit	Principle of detection	Reference
Platinum	Acetamiprid	$0.6 \times 10^{-11}$ M	Impedimetric	[64]
	Atrazine	$0.4 \times 10^{-10}$ M		
Micro cantilever array sensor	Profenofos	$1.3 \text{ ng mL}^{-1}$	optical	[65]
Silver	Malathion	$5 \times 10^{-7}$ to $1 \times 10^{-5} \text{ mol.L}^{-1}$	Surface-enhanced Raman scattering	[66]
Gold	Malathion	1.94 pM	Colorimetric	[11]
Platinum	Acetamiprid	1 pM	Impedimetric	[64]
	Atrazine	10 pM		
GO-CuNPs*	Prophenofos	0.003 nM	Co-electrodeposition	[67]
	Phorate	0.3 nM		
	Isocarbophos	0.03 nM		
	Omethoate	0.3 nM		

\*GO-CuNPs: Graphene oxide-copper nanoparticles



**Figure 1:** Engineering aptamers to bind specific targets.

#### Molecularly imprinted polymers (MIPs)

Various polymers are can be moulded into sensors using the molecular imprinting technique as this technique provides recognition site for the desired analyte.

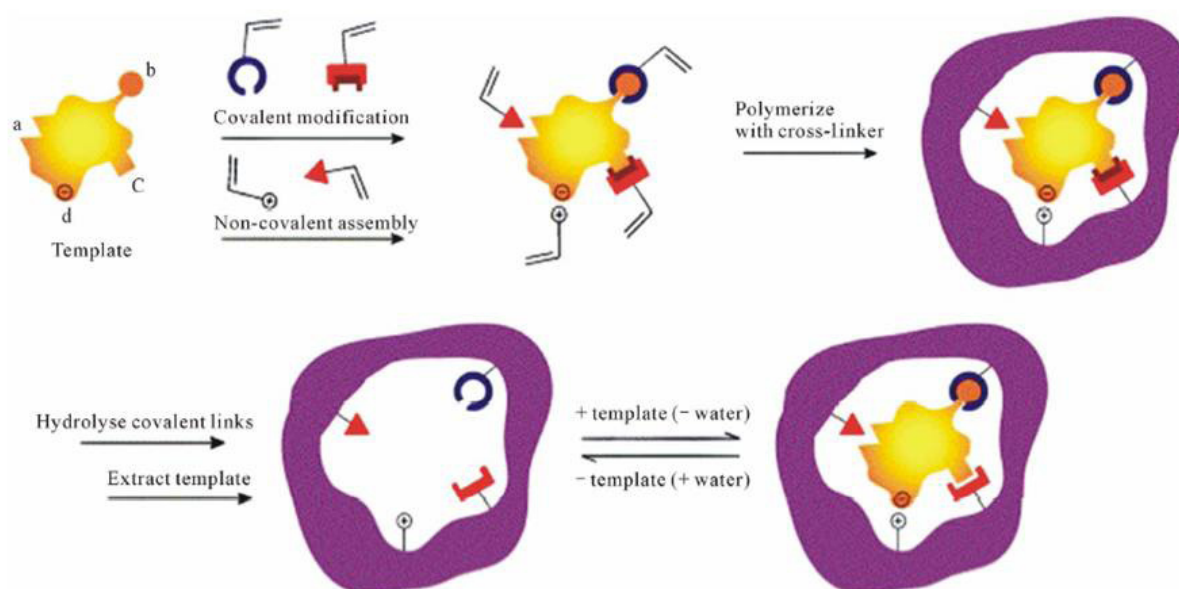
General strategy for making as stated by Mayes and Whitcombe [68] starts with template that interact with monomers using covalent bonding or by self-association. These monomers later on polymerizes around the template and after that the template is washed off and we obtain a synthetic polymer. These polymers can also be used for detection of pesticides.

**Table 6:** MIP based biosensors for detection of pesticides.

Type of material	Pesticide detected	Detection limit	Principle of detection	Reference
Silica nanoparticles	Pyrethroid (3-phenoxybenzaldehyde)	0.1 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ - 1 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$	Colorimetric	[69]
$\text{SiO}_2$ @QDs@m-MIPs	2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid	2.1 nM	Fluorescence	[70]
Methacrylic acid based m-MIP	Methyl parathion	$1.22 \times 10^{-6} \text{ mg L}^{-1}$	Electrochemical	[71]
Photonic hydrogel film	Imidacloprid	$10^{-13}$ to $10^{-7} \text{ g.mL}^{-1}$	Optical	[72]
AuNPs/ERGO-SPCE*	Cyhexatin	0.20 ng mL <sup>-1</sup>	Electrochemical	[73]
MIP coated-QDs	Cyphenothran	9.0 nmol L <sup>-1</sup>	Fluorescence	[74]
Ag-N@ZnO/CHAC#	Cypermethrin	$6.7 \times 10^{-14} \text{ M}$	Electrochemical	[75]
MWCNT-MIP	Lindane	$1 \times 10^{-10} \text{ M}$	Potentiometric	[76]
MWCNT-MIP	Dicloran	$4.8 \times 10^{-10} \text{ mol L}^{-1}$	Volatmmetric	[77]
Molecularly imprinted film	Methyl parathion	$10^{-13} \text{ mol L}^{-1}$	Optical	[78]

\* AuNPs/ERGO-SPCE: Gold nanoparticle/electrochemical reduction graphene oxide-modified screen-printed carbon electrode

# Ag-N@ZnO/CHAC: Ag and N co-doped zinc oxide ultrasonically supported on activated carbon prepared from coconut husk

**Figure 2:** Schematic representation of the molecular imprinting [68].

### Artificial neural networks

In order to simultaneously identify and differentiate among a multiple number of pesticides especially in the case of Ace inhibitors, ANNs can be instrumental and promising. In this an array of sensors is linked with an ANN.

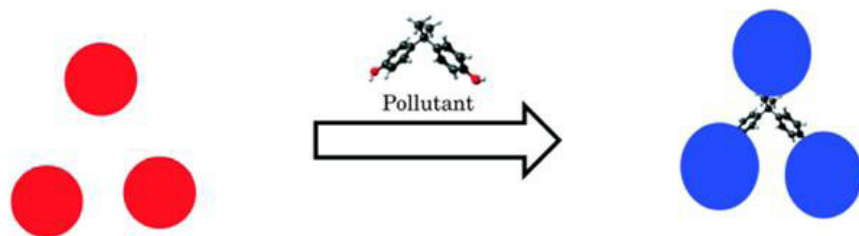
This ANNs is a procedural data processing unit based on the enzymatic response pattern that depends on the concentration of each inhibitor in the sample [79].

### Conclusions

Pesticides, although, successful in eliminating unwanted pests and other insects from the soil, have proven to be a menace for water bodies, soil quality, plant and human health. Hence, the need to develop adequate analytical techniques for their detection is indispensable. The conventional methods of analysis such as gas chromatography and mass spectrometry seem unsuitable because of their operational complexities, issues in portability, inability to perform multiple sample analysis,

time consuming nature and need for tedious pre-treatment of the samples to be analysed. These limitations led to the emergence of alternate analytical techniques including development of biosensors such as enzymatic, catalytic, immune-sensing and whole cell biosensors based on various amperometric, conductometric and potentiometric detection techniques.

Biosensors based on nanomaterials, aptamers, Molecularly Imprinted Polymers (MIPs) and Artificial Neural Network (ANN) offer robust, stable, sensitive and specific detection of pesticides along with their ability for in-situ analysis. With controllable structure and interface interaction properties, nanomaterials such as gold nanoparticles and carbon nanotubes exhibit unconventional and novel chemical and physical features that are vital for widespread future sensor applications. Gold nanoparticles based biosensors are potent candidates for screening pesticide residues and are becoming increasingly pertinent in environmental as well as food analysis because of their sensitivity, specificity, rapidity, simplicity, and cost-effectiveness.



**Figure 3:** Detection of pesticides based on gold nanoparticles.

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