In future research, developing materials, fuels and energy devices from renewable resources would be fascinating yet demanding practice, which will have a direct impact on industrial applications, and economically viable alternatives. This talk presents a novel and emerging concept of generating new chemicals, intermediates and products in a ‘Biorefinery’. Our continuous efforts in this area led us to develop new glycolipids from industrial byproducts such as cashew-nut-shell-liquid, which upon self-assembly produced nanoarchitectures including lipid nanotubes, twisted/helical nanofibers, low-molecular-weight gels and liquid crystals. More recently, we have developed multiple systems based on biobased organic synthesis by chemical/ biocatalytic methods for functional applications. We used the ‘chiral pool’ of carbohydrates using the selectivity of enzyme catalysis yield amphiphilic products from biobased feedstock including amygdalin, trehalose and vitamin-C. Amygdalin amphiphiles showed unique gelation behaviour in a broad range of solvents such as non-polar hexanes to polar aqueous solutions. Importantly, an enzyme-triggered drug-delivery model for hydrophobic drugs was demonstrated by using these supramolecularly assembled hydrogels. Intriguingly, by combining biocatalysis, with principles of green and supramolecular chemistry, we developed building blocks-to-assembled materials. These results will lead to efficient molecular design of supramolecular architectures and soft materials from underutilized plant/crop-based renewable feedstock.

Dr. George John is an Associate Professor of Chemistry, the City College of the City University of New York (CUNY). After obtaining his Ph.D. in Chemistry from Kerala University, he held several research positions-in the Netherlands, Japan and at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York before joining CUNY. His research interests are in the broad area of organic and macromolecular materials chemistry, green chemistry and nanoscience. George is recognized for his active research in the field of biobased products, functional molecular materials and green nanotechnology. His recent research on self-assembled soft materials has been widely acclaimed in many publications including Discovery News, Nature, Newsweek, Scientific American and in the New York Times. He is on the editorial team of two international journals. He has published over 50 scientific papers and holds more than a dozen patents on inventions related to value-added chemicals from plant/crop-based resources and biomaterials. Visit him at http://www.sci.ccny.cuny.edu/~john/ for more details.