

SOAP – A Continuing Sustainability Journey

Consumer products of everyday use like soaps, shampoos, toothpastes etc. while indispensable for our health and daily hygiene, also consume a significant amount of material resources mainly owing to the high volumes consumed. These material resources can be oils like Palm used for saponification or petroleum based surfactants, both of which carry a significant greenhouse gas (GHG) footprint. There is a need to critically re-look at the role played by the various ingredients in these products and re-design them for material efficiency while maintaining the consumer functionality. The talk will use a humble bar of soap as an example to illustrate this journey touching upon the past and future of soap bars –

A brief history of soaps that spans an interesting journey starting with its first mention on Sumerian tablets ~2800 BC and the advances through the years aided by various technological breakthroughs that facilitated the manufacture of modern day soaps. The future of soap bars – why is there a need today to change what we have been doing for 100s of years. What are the challenges in executing these changes from a formulation and processing viewpoint and why we still need bright students like you to ponder over soap.