Highly conductive poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) and poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) enwrapped Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods for flexible supercapacitors

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Composites of poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) or PEDOP and poly(3,4-ethylenedioxythiophene) or PEDOT enwrapped Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods have been synthesized for the first time for use as supercapacitor electrodes. Hydrothermally synthesized Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods, several microns in length and 50–150 nm wide, offer high surface area and serve as a scaffold for coating conducting polymers, and are a viable alternative to carbon nanostructures. Fibrillar morphologies are achieved for the PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ films in contrast to the regular granular topologies attained for the neat polymers. The remarkably high nanoscale (≈5 S cm$^{-1}$) conductivity of the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods enables facile electron transport in the composites. We constructed asymmetric supercapacitors using the neat polymer or composite and graphite as electrodes. High specific capacitances of 1008 F g$^{-1}$ and 830 F g$^{-1}$ (at 1 A g$^{-1}$), enhanced power densities (504 and 415 W kg$^{-1}$) and excellent cycling stability (88 and 85% capacitance retention at the end of 1000 cycles) are delivered by the PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ cells relative to the neat polymer cells. A demonstration of a light emitting diode illumination using a light-weight, flexible, supercapacitor fabricated with PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and carbon-fiber cloth shows the applicability of Sb$_2$S$_3$ enwrapped conducting polymers as sustainable electrodes for ultra-thin supercapacitors.

1. Introduction

Redox supercapacitors based on conducting polymer composites are arousing enormous research interest for use as electrodes in high power energy storage devices such as electric vehicles and portable electronic devices. Supercapacitors work in tandem with batteries to provide high peak power and to increase the operational lifetime of batteries. A redox supercapacitor relies on the pseudocapacitive nature of the electroactive material (like a conducting polymer) and stores energy faradaically, which involves mass transfer (ions and electrons) at the conducting polymer/electrolyte and current collector/conducting polymer interfaces. Conducting polymers offer many advantages: they can be easily switched between reduced (dedoped) and oxidized (doped) states, they are cheap, offer low toxicity and can be easily prepared in bulk or film forms at room temperature. Further, by inclusion of a chemically compatible electronically conducting nanostructured moiety (such as multi-walled carbon nanotubes) along with the conducting polymer, the large surface area of the nanotubes enables a large mass loading of the conducting polymer, which effectively leads to a high capacitance. In a pristine conducting polymer electrode based cell, owing to the poor accessibility of the electrolyte to the internal redox active sites on the polymer, a consequence of the compact granular polymer morphology, the electroactive material remains largely under-utilized and therefore the capacitances are not very high. Until now, most efforts have been devoted to creating conducting polymer nanocomposites with either electronically conductive carbon nanostructures such as graphene, carbon nanotubes, carbon fibers or by use of a complementary pseudocapacitive transition metal oxide like RuO$_2$, MnO$_2$, Co$_3$O$_4$, V$_2$O$_5$ and NiO. In a carbon nano-moiety-conducting polymer composite, the synergy between the ability of the polymer to store and release faradaic charge by undergoing redox reactions and the capability of the carbon nano-moiety to function as an electron conduit, thereby allowing charge storage by electrical double layer formation, translates into high capacitance and therefore high power density. The need to develop new alternate materials capable of charge storage stems from the fact that supercapacitor designs using...
carbon nanostructures/conducting polymer composites have been exhaustively investigated and possibilities are often limited to the use of graphene or multi/single-walled carbon nanotubes or fibers. In the past, although graphene or multi/single-walled carbon nanotube enwrapped conducting polymer composites have demonstrated excellent performance characteristics, when employed as electrodes in supercapacitors, but further improving the electrical conductivity of the composite at a low cost remains a formidable challenge. Among various desirable architectures for electrodes, one-dimensional nanostructures are attractive as they offer short diffusion lengths for ions and high charge–discharge rates. For instance, a poly(aniline) fibrous structure coated with MnO2 nanorods yielded a specific capacitance of 417 F g⁻¹.¹⁷ Yet another study on an ultrathin flexible all-solid-state supercapacitor with carbon nanotubes–poly(aniline) or PANI nanocomposite thin films as electrodes showed a rather high specific capacitance of 350 F g⁻¹ in its twisted state.¹⁸ Another report on a novel supercapacitor with a pyrene functionalized polyfluorene as an adhesive inter-layer between poly(3,4-propylenedioxyppyrole) and single walled carbon nanotubes revealed a capacitance of 122 F g⁻¹.¹⁹ In a previous report, flexible, uniform graphene–poly(pyrrrole) composite films prepared by a pulsed electro-polymerization technique exhibited a specific capacitance of 237 F g⁻¹ and a power density of 1184 W kg⁻¹.²⁰

It is obvious that carbon nanostructures by the virtue of large specific area endowed by their tubular or sheet like morphologies allow greater uptake of ions and also permit fast and efficient charge ingress and egress, thus manifesting in large specific capacitance and high power density.

By considering the above-mentioned factors which can boost supercapacitor performance, we fabricated, for the first time, electrodes of electrically conductive and economically viable, and less toxic antimony sulfide (Sb₂S₃) nanorods enwrapped by a conducting polymer directly with tube or wire like morphologies, generally, templates such as anodized alumina are employed and the outstanding performance of a PEDOP–Sb₂S₃ electrode thus illustrating the promise the conductive Sb₂S₃ nanorods show as scaffolds for a plethora of electroactive materials.

2. Experimental

2.1. Chemicals

3,4-Ethylenedioxyppyrole (EDOP), 3,4-ethylendioxythiophene (EDOT), poly(methylmethacrylate) (PMMA), sodium borohydride (NaBH₄), sulfur and graphite were procured from Sigma-Aldrich and used as received. 1-Butyl-3-methyl-imidazolium tris(pentafluoroethyl)trifluorophosphate (BuMeIm+[(C₂F₅)₃(PF₃)])_², anti-

mony chloride (SbCl₅), ethylene glycol, isopropanol and acetone were purchased from Merck chemicals. Ultrapure water (resistivity ~ 18.2 MΩ cm) was obtained through a Millipore Direct-Q3 UV system. SnO₂:F (FTO) coated glass substrates with a sheet resistance of about 14 Ω sq⁻¹ were procured from Pilkington, washed with soap solution, flushed with copious amounts of distilled water and cleaned with acetone prior to use. A carbon fiber cloth of 3 mm thickness was purchased from Alibaba Pvt. Ltd.

2.2. Synthesis of Sb₂S₃ nanorods

SbCl₃ (0.25 g) was dissolved in ultrapure water (30 mL) and stirred for 10 min, followed by addition of ethylene glycol (30 mL) at room temperature. After stirring for another 10 min, sulfur (0.1 g) and NaBH₄ (0.3 g) were added slowly. The mixture was stirred for another 30 min, transferred to an autoclave of 100 mL capacity and heated for 12 h at 180 °C. A black precipitate was obtained, which was filtered and washed with deionized water and then dried at 60 °C. The resulting Sb₂S₃ nanorods were stored in air.

2.3. Fabrication of electrodes and devices

EDOT (0.1 M) and EDOT (0.1 M) monomer solutions were prepared in acetonitrile (30 mL) separately, 0.1 M 1-butyl-3-methyl-imidazolium tris(pentafluoroethyl)trifluorophosphate was used as the dopant ion source in each case. SnO₂:F (FTO) coated glass or carbon fiber cloth (of area 1 × 2 cm²) was employed as the working electrode and a Pt sheet was used as the counter electrode and Ag/AgCl/KCl was used as the

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reference electrode. Blue colored PEDOT and bluish-black PEDOP films were obtained under potentiostatic conditions at room temperature in chronoamperometric mode by application of +1.5 V to the working electrode for 500 s. The Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods (1.5 g) were added to the monomer bath and the solution was sonicated for 30 min and the same procedure was repeated to yield PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ films.

A dispersion of graphite (0.1 g) in ethanol (30 mL) was prepared by ultrasonication for 15 min and using a two electrode configuration with FTO coated glass or carbon fiber cloth, graphite coatings were obtained on one of the electrodes upon application of a constant potential of 20 V for 5 min using a Tarsons MC-01 electrophoresis power supply. Graphite electrodes have been labeled as Gr in this study. A quasi-solid polymer electrolyte was synthesized by dissolving PMMA (1 g) in the ionic liquid: (BuMeIm$_+$[(C$_2$F$_5$)$_3$(PF$_3$)$_2$]) (4 g) by continuous stirring at 80 °C for 5–6 h until a transparent viscous gel was obtained which had little flow properties when cooled to room temperature. An acrylic tape of 0.5 mm thickness was employed as the spacer and was applied along the four edges of the active electrode, the electrolyte was filled in the cavity using a glass rod and heated in a vacuum oven at 50 °C until a bubble free electrolyte layer was obtained. The counter electrode (Gr) was then pressed upon this assembly and the whole configuration was held together using binder clips and placed in an online vacuum oven for 1 h. The edges were finally sealed with an epoxy. Asymmetric cells with either FTO coated glass or carbon fiber cloth as current collectors were obtained with the following configurations: PEDOP-Gr, PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr, PEDOT-Gr and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr.

2.4. Instrumental methods

X-ray photoelectron spectroscopy (XPS) was carried out using a Perkin Elmer 1257 model operating at a base pressure of ~4.2 × 10$^{-8}$ Torr (100 Watt, 15 KV) with a non-monochromatized Mg K$_\alpha$ line at 1253.6 eV, an analyzer pass energy of 60 eV, and a hemispherical sector analyzer capable of 25 meV resolution. The overall instrumental resolution was about 0.3 eV. The core level spectra were deconvoluted using a non-linear iterative least squares Gaussian fitting procedure. For all fitting multiplets, the FWHMs were fixed accordingly. Corrections due to charging effects were taken care of by using C(1s) as an internal reference and the Fermi edge of a gold sample. Jandel Peak FitTM (version 4.01) program was used for the analyses. Absorption spectra were measured on a Shimadzu UV-visible-NIR 3600 spectrophotometer. X-ray diffraction patterns were recorded on a PANalytical, X’PertPRO instrument with Cu-K$_\alpha$ ($\lambda$ = 1.5406 Å) radiation. Raman spectra were recorded for the electrodes on a Bruker Senterra Dispersive Raman Microscope spectrometer; the laser excitation wavelength was fixed at 785 nm. XRD patterns of Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods and Raman spectra of neat PEDOP and PEDOT films and Sb$_2$S$_3$ are provided in ESI† (Fig. S1, S2 and Table S1). Atomic force microscopy (AFM) and conducting-AFM (C-AFM) measurements were performed on the electrodes using a Veeco, Multimode 8 with a ScanAsyst (Nanoscope 8.10 software) microscope. The conductive probes used in this study were coated with Pt–Ir on front and back sides. The probe tip had a radius of 10 nm, spring constant of 0.2 N cm$^{-1}$, a current sensitivity of 1 nA V$^{-1}$ and a load force of 50 nN was maintained between the tip and the sample. The sample deposited on FTO coated glass (area ~ 9 mm$^2$) was affixed on a stainless steel disk with a conducting carbon tape. A thin strip of pin-hole free silver paste was used for making contacts. The C-AFM cantilever scans the surface while in contact and both the topography and the current flowing through the sample are imaged at the same time. A contact topography image is generated by using the feedback loop to maintain the constant tip deflection and the current image is generated by measuring the current flow. A 50 mV bias was applied to the tip during imaging. Surface morphology analysis was performed using a Carl Zeiss (Supra 40) field emission scanning electron microscope (FE-SEM). Galvanostatic charge–discharge measurements were performed using a battery testing unit (Arbin Instruments, BT 2000) at different current densities in the voltage range of 0 to +1.0 V for two-electrode cells. Specific capacitance (SC, F g$^{-1}$) was determined using the galvanostatic charge–discharge curves. Electropolymerization, cyclic voltammetry and electrochemical impedance spectra were recorded on an Autolab PGSTAT 302N equipped with NOVA 1.7 software.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Topography of electrodes

AFM images of pristine Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods are shown in Fig. 1. The low magnification topographical images of neat Sb$_2$S$_3$ (Fig. 1a and c) reveal a three-dimensional network of interlinked but
randomly oriented rods, with lengths varying from 1 to 3 \( \mu \text{m} \) and widths ranging from 50 to 150 nm. Since there are hardly any particulate shapes visible in the images, it is obvious that the synthetic process is quite efficient for producing homogeneously distributed rectangular shaped nanorods. The high magnification image of pristine \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) nanorods shows that the rods have flattened surfaces and they tend to aggregate (Fig. 1b). The thickness of the rod, which was measured from a cross-sectional profile is approximately 80 nm and upon stacking the thickness increased to about 300 nm (Fig. 1d).

The SEM images of pristine \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) nanorods, shown in Fig. 2a and b, reveal the nanorods to be characterized by forest like growth, misaligned with respect to each other, but devoid of any branching. There are no particles or aggregates indicating that the sample is entirely made up of uniform nanorods having a smooth surface texture. The rods extend up to few microns in length and their diameters vary between 50 to 150 nm which concur with the AFM observations. The inset of Fig. 2b shows a high contrast image of the rod, and the rod width/thickness was 80 nm. The SEM images of the PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) composite (Fig. 2c and d) show the \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) nanorods to be juxtaposed with the PEDOP grains, indicating a good mixing of the polymer with the rods, the particulate sheath formed on the rods stem from the polymer. The inset of Fig. 2d shows the width of the rod to be 230 nm, which is greater than that of pristine \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) rods indicating the presence of a polymer around the rod. Further, it is also noticed that the pristine rods have sharp edges whereas upon integration with the polymer, their edges are jagged, indicative of polymer incorporation. This was observed in both composites. The SEM image of the PEDOT–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) composite (Fig. 2e and f) shows the nanorods to be coated with the polymer.

The high contrast inset in Fig. 2f shows a core \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) rod with a diameter of \( \sim 80 \text{ nm} \) surrounded by a polymer sheath of approximately 60 nm thickness on either side, taking the total width to 200 nm. It is obvious that the inclusion of \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) nanorods in the polymer matrix affords high surface area to facilitate electrochemical reactions, in contrast to pristine PEDOP or PEDOT. The SEM images of PEDOP and PEDOT are shown in Fig. S2, ESI.†

The pristine conducting polymer films have a granular morphology typical of electropolymerized conducting polymers.

3.2. XPS studies of electrodes

The survey spectra of the PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \), PEDOT–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) and pristine \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) films are shown in Fig. S5 (ESI†). Signals from C1s, Sb3d, P2p, F1s and S2p levels are common to the survey spectra of both PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) and PEDOT–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \), but the PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) film shows an additional signal from N1s. While the antimony and sulfur peaks indicate the inclusion of \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) quantum dots in the polymer matrix, the fluorine and phosphorous peaks imply the incorporation of the ionic liquid anion: \( [\text{C}_2\text{F}_5\text{P}(\text{PF}_6)]^- \) as the counter ion compensating the positive charge on the polymer (PEDOP or PEDOT) backbone. The deconvoluted C1s core level spectrum of PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) film (Fig. 3a) consists of four components at 284.6, 286, 289.2 and 290.8 eV, which can be attributed to C–C, C–N, C–O and C–F linkages respectively whereas the C1s spectrum of PEDOT–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) film (Fig. 3b) is asymmetric indicating that nitrogen prevails in two different chemical environments. The low energy peak at 399.5 eV arises from the –NH– bond of the pyrrole ring in the polymer and the high energy peak at 401.5 eV stems from the nitrogen of the 1-butyl-3-methyl imidazolium cation. The insertion of the imidazolium cation along with the trialkylphosphate (FAP) anion in the polymer film, during oxidative electropolymerization, is not unusual, as has been observed in the past by us for PEDOT films doped by ionic liquid functionalized graphene.27 Since the charge on every

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**Fig. 2** FE-SEM images of (a, b) \( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) nanorods, (c, d) PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) and (e, f) PEDOT–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) films. Insets of (b, d and f) are enlarged high contrast images derived from the micrographs.

**Fig. 3** Deconvoluted core level spectra of (a) C1s, (b) N1s, (c) P2p and (d) Sb3d of a PEDOP–\( \text{Sb}_2\text{S}_3 \) film. Insets of (b) and (d) are the F1s and S2p core level spectra.
measure of the FAP counter-ion content in the polymer com-
PEDOT films doped by poly(styrene sulfonate) or PSS. 28 The
our value is close to a value of 0.3 reported in the past for
the doping level in PEDOP by FAP ions. The ratio is 0.28, which is the doping level in PEDOP by the ionic liquid. The value of this
ratio is 0.37, which is the doping level in PEDOP by FAP ions. Our value is close to a value of 0.3 reported in the past for
PEDOT films doped by poly(styrene sulfonate) or PSS. 28 The
atomic ratio of \( I_{\text{BuMeIm}}/I_{\text{N(total)}} \) is \( \sim 7 \) for the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) film, and is only slightly greater than the theoretical ratio of 6. A digression from the theoretical ratio of C: S, i.e. a value of 5:1 has been previously observed in films of PEDOT doped with dodecyl sulfate ions. 29 Authors attributed cause of deviation to the phase segregation of surfactant anions in the polymer surface region. The core-level spectrum of N1s was far too weak to extract reliable contribution from the imidazolium ion, in the PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) film. The deconvoluted P2p spectra for both PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) films (Fig. 3c and 4c) reveal two components at 135.5 and 134.2 eV due to the spin–orbit split, ascribable to P2p\(_{3/2}\) and P2p\(_{1/2}\) levels, and they originate from the PF\(_3\) groups in the FAP anion. 29 These two films also show a single, intense, symmetric peak at \( \sim 689 \) nm arising from the F1s levels from the C–F and P–F bonds in the FAP anion. The twin peaks from Sb3d are clearly seen for both
films (Fig. 3d), indicating the inclusion of Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) in the composites.

The S2p core level spectrum of PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) consists of two peaks corresponding to the spin-split doublet: S2p\(_{3/2}\) and S2p\(_{1/2}\) at 163.8 and 162.3 eV respectively with a relative intensity of 1:2 (inset of Fig. 3d). This doublet arises from sulfide in Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\), as the polymer does not contain any sulfur. The S2p spectrum of PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) comprises of three sulfur doublets (Fig. 4b), the lowest energy pair at 162 and 163.2 eV originates from the sulfide ions (S\(^2^-\)) in Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\), the peak pair in the middle arises from neutral sulfur (–S–) of the thiophene rings in the polymer and the highest energy doublet arises from ionic sulfur (–S\(^+\)).

The sulfide content in the PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composite, denoted by \( I_{\text{BuMeIm}}/(I_{\text{N(total)}}) \) is found to be 0.65; it involves contribution only from the sulfide in Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\), and not from the polymer. This value is reasonably high, indicating that a high proportion of Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) prevails in the polymer. A crude estimate of the Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) content in PEDOP was also obtained from the ratio of the intensities of the split carbon peak’s C–C component to the S2p peak (Fig. S5a, ESI); the \( I_{\text{S2p}}/I_{\text{C–C}} \) was found to be 0.56.

### 3.3. Conducting-AFM studies on electrodes

Fig. 5 shows the topography and current images simultaneously recorded for identical regions of Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\), PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) films; the scanned area was 5 \( \mu \)m \times 5 \( \mu \)m for each film. The difference in the topography ongoing from Fig. 1 to 5 for

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the same samples (Sb$_2$S$_3$, PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$) arises from the different modes used for making the measurement. While contact mode is used in C-AFM, tapping mode is used for recording conventional topography images (more details and the cross-sectional profiles (Fig. S6) are provided in ESI†). Here, the current images were generated by contacting a conductive tip with the film surface and a small bias voltage of 50 mV was applied between the tip and the substrate while the tip runs horizontally over the surface. In the current images, the bright regions are attributed to the high current flowing capability, and the maximum current flowing through the film is 1.1 µA. The color-scale on the right side of the images provides a measure of the currents propagating in the films. The maximum currents neat PEDOP and PEDOT films are capable of carrying are 12 and 3.5 nA respectively and the number of high current bright domains are very sparse (Fig. S7b and d, ESI†). On incorporating Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods in the conducting polymer films, the current carrying capability of the polymer films is considerably enhanced, which is also confirmed from the maximum currents of 0.05 and 1 µA observed in the current images of PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ respectively. In the neat polymer films, the current flow is poor as the films comprise of only localized spots of electron conduction, which are embedded in largely insulating regions. In the composites, on the other hand, the homogeneity of the bright regions, characteristic of high electron conductance is far superior to that in the corresponding neat films. The currents of the PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ films are 2 and 1000 times greater than that of neat PEDOP and PEDOT films, for the same value of applied bias. In the PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ films, the enwrapping of the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods by the polymer chains occurs at the molecular level, due to the single step potentiostatic deposition from a plating sol containing both the monomer and the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods. The polymer is in direct contact with the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods, and therefore the flow of electrons through the bulk of the composite is facile as the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods possess an intrinsic ability to conduct electrons. Such an unobstructed electron propagation through the bulk of the neat PEDOP or PEDOT films is not realized, as they are relatively almost electronically insulating.

In the neat PEDOP or PEDOT films, the high current spots/islands are embedded in large insulating domains as opposed to the composite PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ films, wherein the high current (bright) regions tend to dominate, thus improving the cross-sectional conduction of electrons in the film. The current section profile of the composite films (Fig. S6, ESI†) complements the imaging, as the span of crests corresponding to high currents is significantly wider than the (few) troughs corresponding to low currents. It is apparent that localized electron conduction is rather uniform across the composite films. The exactly opposite response was obtained for the neat films, as very few peaks corresponding to high currents were observed (Fig. S8, ESI†). Point contact $I$–$V$ curves were recorded at fifteen equidistant points on each current image, and the average $I$–$V$ profile for each film is shown (Fig. 5c, f and i). A quasi-linear dependence of current on swept potential was confined to narrow voltage windows. From the straight-line fits, within the voltage windows in which the $I$–$V$ response was almost linear, ambient temperature electronic conductivities were determined by using eqn (1),

$$\sigma_{RT} = \frac{(I/V)}{(d/\pi r^2)}$$

where $r$ is the radius of the conducting tip and $d$ is the thickness of the film. The average electronic conductivities for Sb$_2$S$_3$, PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ films were deduced from the ohmic regimes and were calculated to be 5, 1.735 and 1.01 S cm$^{-1}$ respectively. The nanoscale conductivities of neat PEDOP and PEDOT were determined to be 0.053 and 0.068 S cm$^{-1}$ respectively. The considerably enhanced average nanoscale conductivities of the composite films, 32 and 15 times greater than their neat counterparts, show that the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods provide facile conduction pathways for electron movement and naturally enhance the conducting capacity of the polymer film.

### 3.4. Cyclic voltammetric studies

Fig. 6a and b show the comparison of cyclic voltammograms of neat films and their corresponding composites (PEDOP and PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$), recorded at a constant scan rate of 50 mV s$^{-1}$ in the potential range of 0 to +1 V. The CV profiles for PEDOT and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ exhibit distinct rectangular shapes, indicating their capacitive nature. However, the area under the voltammogram is substantially higher for the composites compared to the neat polymer film, which implies a higher ion storage capacity for the former. The current density maxima with a plateau like span over a potential range of 0.1 to 1 V is 1.4 mA cm$^{-2}$ for the composite as compared to 0.3 mA cm$^{-2}$ for the neat polymer. A 5-fold increment in
current density ongoing from PEDOT to PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ is a clear indicator of the capability of Sb$_2$S$_3$ to uptake a greater amount of the conducting polymer, for the same geometric area. For the PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ composite, a quasi-rectangular voltammetric profile was observed, the slight undulations in the current density curve in the anodic scan is a consequence of oxidation of the polymer. The better accessibility of the electrolyte anions with PEDOT chains is afforded by the intertwined nanorods’ morphology of Sb$_2$S$_3$. The polymer enwrapped Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods have interconnected elongated tubular morphologies, and the FAP or [(C$_2$F$_5$)$_3$(PF$_3$)]$^-$ ions from the electrolyte percolate more easily and have better access to the electroactive sites as compared to the pristine polymer. The neat polymers have granular compact morphologies, and therefore counter ion propagation through the film is not facile and as a consequence the ion storage capacity is lesser than that of the composites. It is also known that fast and efficient electron transfer from the electroactive film to the current collector enables a higher ion uptake from the electrolyte solution, and this is realized in the composite owing to the larger nanoscale electronic conductivities of the composites. The electrically conductive Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods are directly in contact with the PEDOP or PEDOT in the composites, which facilitate electron transport through the bulk of the composite and therefore improve the overall ion uptake capability of the electroactive electrode. Fig. 6c and d display the CV plots of the PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr based supercapacitor cells recorded at different scan rates. All the curves retain an almost rectangular shape, even at a high scan rate of 100 mV s$^{-1}$, which is characteristic of low contact resistance of the supercapacitor. A similar observation was made for a graphene hydrogel-MnO$_2$ based supercapacitor in a previous report. The increase in the redox current as a function of scan rate, observed for the composite cells, is suggestive of good rate capability.

3.5. Charge-discharge characteristics of cells

The galvanostatic charge–discharge curves of PEDOP-Gr, PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr, PEDOT-Gr and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr cells (obtained at a fixed current density of 1 A g$^{-1}$ using a potential window of 0–1 V) are shown in Fig. 7a and b. All the four cells show a triangular shape, implying that the potential of charge or discharge varies linearly with time, which is indicative of good reversibility. The charge–discharge times vary for different electrodes, for a fixed value of applied current density, thus indicating different specific capacitances. The specific capacitance of the redox and redox composite based cells was calculated from the slope of the discharge curve and by using following equation.

$$C = i \times \frac{\Delta t}{\Delta V} \times m$$

In eqn (2), $C$ is the specific capacitance, $i$ is the current applied for discharge, $\Delta t$ is the time in seconds for discharge, $\Delta V$ is the voltage window and $m$ is the mass of active material of the working electrode. The details of capacitance calculations are provided in ESI.$^\dagger$ The specific capacitance for the PEDOT-Gr cell is 717 F g$^{-1}$ in comparison to a SC of 1008 F g$^{-1}$ achieved for the composite, at the same current density of 1 A g$^{-1}$.

Similarly, for the PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr cell, it is 830 F g$^{-1}$, relative to 630 F g$^{-1}$ for the cell based on the neat polymer. The large difference in specific capacitance ongoing from the neat polymer to the corresponding composite also points to the fact that the nanorods like morphology of Sb$_2$S$_3$ increases the anion intercalation capability of the polymer (by the virtue of large accessible surface area coated with the polymer). The higher accessible surface area to mass ratio achieved in the composites is responsible for the higher specific capacitances. The three-dimensional network of electrically conductive Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods serves as a scaffold for the conducting polymers in the composites. In a previous report, Liu et al. obtained a specific capacitance of 664 F g$^{-1}$ for a composite PEDOT–RuO$_2$ hollow nanotube based cell.$^{12}$ In yet another study, a specific capacitance of 210 F g$^{-1}$ was achieved for coaxial MnO$_2$–PEDOT nanowires.$^{13}$ Our values are comparable to literature values for conducting polymer nanostructured electrodes. The rate capability of the neat polymer and composite based cells was determined by recording the charge–discharge curves at different current densities of 0.2, 0.4, 0.6 and 1 A g$^{-1}$ (Fig. 7c and d). The PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ composite retained 88% of its capacitance when the current density was increased from 0.2 to 1 A g$^{-1}$, thus indicating good rate performance. The rate performance of the neat polymer was abysmal, as the capacitance was only 630 F g$^{-1}$ at a high current density of 1 A g$^{-1}$.

The cycling stability of the PEDOT-Gr, PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr, PEDOT-Gr and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$-Gr cells was also compared. The variation of
specific capacitance (obtained from the charge–discharge curves, at a current density of 1 A g\(^{-1}\)), as a function of galvanostatic charge–discharge cycles is shown in Fig. 7e and f. At the end of 1000 charge–discharge cycles, while the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr cell retained 87% of its initial capacitance, the corresponding neat polymer cell maintained only 70% of its original capacitance. The PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) cell also exhibited improved capacitance retention compared to the neat PEDOT cell. Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) nanorods furnish a robust support for the conducting polymers which prevents the polymer from swelling and shrinking during repetitive electrochemical cycling. This advantage is not realized in the cells based on neat polymers, and as a result, their capacitance decreases more steeply with cycling.

3.6. Electrochemical impedance spectroscopy

The Nyquist plots of PEDOP–Gr, PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr, PEDOT–Gr and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr cells recorded under an ac perturbation signal of 0.1 mV, in the frequency range of 0.01 to 1 MHz, are shown in Fig. 8 and the related parameters are summarized in Table S2 (ESI†). Almost all the plots are composed of an arc followed by an inclined straight line. The undefined semicircle involves a parallel combination of interfacial resistance due to charge transfer \(R_{\text{CT}}\) and the corresponding electrical double layer capacitance \((C_{\text{dl}})\). The span of this arc is extremely small for both PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) and PEDOT–Gr composites as compared to the neat polymer. This indicates that the charge transfer resistance is small and the redox system is kinetically fast. The \(R_{\text{CT}}\) values are 296 Ω for PEDOP and 55 Ω for the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composite. The lower values of \(R_{\text{CT}}\) for both composites show that electron transfer from the composite to the underlying FTO electrode accompanied by anion transfer from the electrolyte to the composite is more facile relative to their rates in the neat PEDOP or PEDOT based cells. In the composite, the polymer coated Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) nanorods allow more number of electrolyte ions to access redox active sites on the polymer easily. In the low frequency regime, the impedance plot increases steeply and becomes almost vertical for all the four electrodes, characteristic of pure capacitive behavior. The extrapolation of the straight line yields the x-axis intercept which is equal to \(R_0 + 1/3 R_2\), where \(R_0\) is the uncompensated electrolyte resistance and \(R_2\) stands for the ion diffusion resistance or an internal resistance (characteristic of the electrode material). The ion diffusion resistance was 240 and 9 Ω for the PEDOP and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composites and 18 and 3 Ω for the PEDOT and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composites. This implies that after the counterions are transferred from the bulk gel electrolyte to the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composite, ions can easily diffuse through this electrode comprising of the three-dimensional network of polymer coated nanorods as compared to the neat electrode wherein ion-transport is hindered by the low electronic conductivity and also by the granular morphology. The EIS results reveal that the composites offer low resistance to ion diffusion in the electroactive phase and also to ion transfer at the electrolyte/film interface. The low internal resistance for both electron and ion-movement in the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr composite based cells is responsible for the high capacitances attained by these cells even at a high charge–discharge rate. The fibrillar structures that prevail in the composite films afford short diffusion pathways thus improving the ion-transport properties of the composites. Such effects are not realized in the cells based on the neat PEDOP or PEDOT films and therefore the electrochemical performances are poor. The impedance plots for the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr and PEDOT–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-Gr cells before and after cycling have been compared in Fig. 8c and d. After 1000 cycles, both ion-diffusion resistance and charge transfer resistance increase slightly, which is a manifestation of polymer swelling and shrinking upon repeated ion intercalation and de-intercalation.

3.7 Flexible supercapacitor

The performance characteristics of the conducting polymer–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composites motivated us to fabricate lightweight, flexible supercapacitors, using a carbon fiber cloth (sheet resistance ~2.7 Ω cm\(^{-1}\), thickness ~3 mm, weight ~1.8 g cm\(^{-2}\)) instead of FTO coated glass. The cell was constructed with the following configuration: carbon fiber cloth/PEDOP/Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\)-EtMeIm\(^{+}\)\([\text{CF}_{2}F_{5}]^{3-}\)/PMMA gel-Gr/carbon fiber cloth, wherein, the graphite layer was electrophoretically deposited and the PEDOP–Sb\(_2\)S\(_3\) composite was electropolymerized onto carbon fiber cloths. The galvanostatic charge–discharge plot recorded at a current density of 1 A g\(^{-1}\) and the cyclic voltammetric plot of the cell recorded at 50 mV s\(^{-1}\) are shown in Fig. 9. The specific capacitance was determined to be 150 F g\(^{-1}\), which is comparable to the capacitance (150 F g\(^{-1}\) at 1 A g\(^{-1}\)) achieved for a flexible PEDOT based cell in a previous report.\(^{33}\) In the cyclic voltammogram of the flexible device there is a steep curve at the extreme end from 0.9 V to 1 V. This is probably due to the
over oxidation and side reactions of the carbon fiber electrode. A LED was also illuminated with this cell.

4. Conclusions

Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods, extending in length to a few microns and 50–150 nm in width, and possessing unusually large bulk and nanoscale electronic conductivities, were prepared by a hydrothermal method in a pre-step. PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ composite electrodes were electro-synthesized from a monomer-Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorod suspension. The enwrapping of Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods by PEDOP and PEDOT in the composites was ascertained by XPS and Raman studies, as high proportions of sulfide (greater than 0.5) in the composites were deduced from atomic ratios. The high surface area afforded by the Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods steers the formation of PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ composites with fibrillar structures which are strikingly different from the conventional granular morphologies achieved for the neat PEDOP and PEDOT films. Conducting-AFM analyses also showed the presence of a large number of uniformly distributed high current domains in the composites in contrast to the neat polymers for which sparsely distributed high current spots embedded in largely insulating regions, spanning over a few microns were observed. Further evidence for the effectiveness of Sb$_2$S$_3$ in serving as a three dimensional conductive scaffold was obtained in terms of nanoscale conductivities of the PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ composites which were 32 and 15 times higher in comparison to that obtained for the neat polymers. The role of Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods in greatly improving the ion uptake capability of PEDOP and PEDOT was reflected in the large specific capacitances of 1008 and 830 F g$^{-1}$ (at 1 A g$^{-1}$), good rate capability and repetitive cycling durability (88 and 83% capacitance retention after 1000 cycles) for asymmetric supercapacitors constructed with the composite and graphite as the electrodes. The greatly enhanced power densities of the PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and PEDOT–Sb$_2$S$_3$ composite supercapacitors (504 and 415 W kg$^{-1}$), relative to 315 and 350 W kg$^{-1}$ for neat PEDOP and PEDOP cells are attributed to the fast charge-discharge rates effected by the lower ion-diffusion resistances offered by the composites. A practical demonstration of a LED illumination by use of a thin, lightweight, flexible supercapacitor constructed with PEDOP–Sb$_2$S$_3$ and graphite as the electroactive materials and a carbon-fiber cloth as the current collector opens up possibilities for using this inexpensive facile approach for creating composites of conductive Sb$_2$S$_3$ nanorods with a plethora of other conducting polymers as well for high performance supercapacitors.

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Notes and references