COVID-19 Outreach Effort through Graphic Novel: 'Bharath and Fatima learn about COVID-19'

Dr. Arvind Ramanathan of Institute for Stem Cell Science & Regenerative Medicine (inStem), Bengaluru, in collaboration with Sonia Sen of TIGS-CI, inStem has created an informative graphic novel which was launched on COVID-Gyan website recently. Graphical narration (colloquially referred to as ‘comics’) has a rich history in our culture, with series such as Amar Chitra Katha demonstrating the trans-generational power of this medium. As a faculty at inStem with deep interests in cartooning and graphical narration, Arvind’s effort in developing this comic is to create awareness in non-specialist readers, including children and adults, about the current pandemic.

Team has recently finished this as a campaign on institution’s social media pages- Twitter and Facebook both. Team also created an interesting article about the graphic novel in a Q&A session with Dr. Ramanathan where attempt have been focussed on how graphics/artwork can be a pivotal tool to maximize science communication and outreach effort for complex research topics. The complete novel is also available for download here.

A national crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic calls for clear and simple explanation of the issues at hand. An important aspect of this is to explain the general public the scientific basis of the disease and its effects, possible solutions to mitigate the spread of the disease, and find a cure over time. This task can be greatly assisted by via graphical science i.e. merging art with science which for example can lie at the intersection of comic books and biological sciences. The graphic novel ‘Bharath and Fatima learn about COVID-19’ is one such successful implementation of two young protagonists asking curious questions with thought provoking answers form their uncle Raman, who is a scientist by profession and works on similar topic of interest at inStem, one of the best research institutes of India.