

# Installation: Environmental Awareness Through Multiple Artistic Performances

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## Abstract

The article gave an account of multiple artistic performances in Kolkata, India using music, dance, painting and theatre for environmental awareness specially focusing on global warming. The Other forms were pre planned but the theatrical performance involved public participation using forum theatre technique. The study tried to differentiate the participants and the audience participants according to male female, age group, literary background and economic background. 21-30 age group of participants showed maximum value. Active audience participation in forum was 11.46%. Economic background of the participants was calculated to be from the lower and middle class people while that of the audience also revealed almost the same feature. Result of the forum practice revealed that social and economic equity is necessary to create awareness. The study also clearly endorsed the fact that artistic involvement and active participation of people is one of the best practices for awareness movement because artistic involvement is inherited from the ancestor species of mankind as a method of social bonding. It generates altruism and empathy without which environmental sustainability is impossible. The study thus recommend this method as a model to be followed further.

**Keywords:** Forum theatre, Painting, Environment, Pollution, Global warming

## Introduction

‘We don’t inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our Children’ (Ancient Native American Proverb).

World environment is degrading drastically and perhaps the day is not distant for ruthless annihilation by

Mother Nature. Global warming particularly becomes a threat to mankind. Much of the risk are resulted from air pollution.

‘In 2019, 99% of the world’s population was living in places where the WHO air quality guidelines levels were not met. The combined effects of ambient air pollution and household air pollution are associated with 6.7 million premature deaths annually. Ambient (outdoor) air pollution is estimated to have caused 4.2 million premature deaths worldwide in 2019’.

‘The important part is that approximately 89% of those premature deaths occurred in low- and middle-income countries, and the greatest number in the WHO South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regions’ (WHO (2022); UNEP (2022)).

India exhibited poor status and ranked third in the world among the most affected country regarding pollution load (Statistica, 2021). So far the global warming is concerned surface temperature rise during last decades was reported by Lindsey and Dahlman (2023), NCEI (2023), Bedair et.al. (2023), while specifically from the perspective of India same was reported by Karnik (2021), Kaur et.al. (2023). There are several predictions and projections regarding global warming which indeed creates a tremor in the heart of everybody.

‘A warming El Niño is expected to develop in the coming months and this will combine with human-induced climate change to push global temperatures into uncharted territory.’ ‘This will have far-reaching repercussions for health, food security, water management and the environment. We need to be prepared,’ said WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas (2023) which is in tune with the IPCC report IPCC report (2023).

Under these circumstances scientists, environmentalists and politicians are concerned about the danger of the forthcoming destruction since last century. A lot of measures have been taken up by the international, national, local authorities as well as by different organizational or even personal level for enhancing general public awareness. 5th of June is declared as the World Environmental Day. But unfortunately the awareness among people regarding environmental health is still wanting despite of all measures taken and results are far distant from expectation.

“A public perception study designed to find out the level of awareness — cause, effect, precaution and solution — of air pollution showed that 90% of the people interviewed across highly polluted cities have heard of air pollution but lack awareness about the causes and effects” said Perappadan (2017).

The reason behind such ignorance and casualness is certainly high poverty index and subsequently poor literacy rate without which awareness efforts usually culminates into some seminars of elite section leaving the mass still ignorant. Therefore solution of pollution now needs active participation of people. Participatory method has been described as one of the best practice to build and improve awareness earlier (Ranger, 2016; Heras and Tàbara, 2014; 2015). Poppe et. al. (2018) clearly described the benefits of PP particularly in environmental awareness. There may be several ways to create and enhance participation of people but the present article concerns about the artistic involvement. Artistic involvement has immense capability to turn people to active participant rather to be passive listeners (Boal, 2000). Several works on environmental awareness through active artistic participation were carried out earlier. The Community Environmental Forum Theatre programme was inaugurated in 2002 (Sullivan and Lloyd, 2006). Baldwin (2009) provides ‘an introduction to applied theatre and performance as a body of practice which may enhance the well-being of indigenous communities’. Middlewick et.al. (2012) worked on environmental problem and healthcare issues.

Metcalf and Veiga (2012) reported about use of street theatre to increase awareness of mercury pollution in the artisanal gold mining sector in Zimbabwe. Kasturi and Vardhan (2013) described about the contemporary initiatives to cater social issues through theatre in India. Juárez-Bourke (2018) reported on Performative Methods for Climate Change Communication. In India Greenpeace India organized flash mob method for awareness in Delhi on February 2020. In Kolkata Forum Theatre has been practiced by Jana Sanskriti since more than three decades. Reports are there on pollution awareness (Bhattacharya, 2021) and health awareness (Bhattacharya et.al., 2022) using forum theatre alongwith other art forms from Kolkata earlier. Olvera-Hernández, et.al. (2022) reported Forum Theatre as a mechanism to ‘explore representation of local people's values in environmental governance’.

Under these backdrop theatre group Goria Sucharcha (RGN. NO S/IL/24939 of 2004-2005) and WE, an art organization jointly have taken the initiative called ‘Installation’ where Sucharcha performed forum theatre and WE created a piece of art based on the same theme of environmental awareness on global warming.

### Material and Method

The programme was performed at Goshtotala, Garia (22.46, 88.37). The whole session focused on peoples’ participatory method. Before starting of the play a session of half an hour was scheduled as music, dance and other theatrical games to activate the audience and to break the invisible wall of prejudices and shyness of spectators and at the same time could create a close rapport with the actors. Exercises were carried out following the methods proposed by Boal (1992). During Cultural performance the theatrical productions Bishbinashee (The slayer of poison) of 15 minutes duration based on a holistic way to describe the danger and probable solution of air pollution and global warming was staged as model play. After the performance there was a forum session where audience acted and reacted accordingly. An Installation of art work on a canvas of 8/5 feet on relevant theme was carried on simultaneously by WE. Both theatre performers and audience participated in that drawing also. At the end of the programme distribution ceremony of plant was conducted by local people who managed it by their own cost without any funding from any Government or NGO.

### Result

The study tried to differentiate the participants and the audience participants according to male female, age group, literary background and economic background. So far the age group of participants was concerned the group of 21-30 showed maximum value followed by 31-40, 51-60 while that of 41-50 showed minimum value (Figure 1). The audience age group revealed 41-50 to be the highest participation followed by 31-40, 51-60, 21-30, 11-20, 61-70 and a few other age groups (Figure 2). Audience age group exhibited a bell shaped curve. Active audience participation in forum was 11.46% though at the end of the programme during the group dance and singing almost cent percent audience participated (Figure 3). Male female ratio of participants showed almost fifty fifty while in case of audience it was 64.58% and 35.42% respectively (Figure 4 and 5). The literacy status of the participants calculated was as follows- Master degree comprised the major part of the participants (23.53%), followed by Graduate (17.65) and Secondary level participants (17.65%), Higher Secondary level (11.76%) and CSE, BVA on graphic design, B.F.A Painting, BCA and Doctorate each of 5.8% (Figure 6). The same could not be calculated for the audience except those who actively participated.

Their academic qualification revealed that nine out of eleven participants were at or above graduation level but two of them were absolutely illiterate. Finally the economic background of the participants was calculated which exhibited the bulk participation from the lower and middle class people (Figure 7a and 7b) while that of the audience also revealed almost the same feature.

The theatrical production started with a general story but after portraying the model play discourse was initiated and eventually the story no longer confined into the issue of mere environmental problem of a given spatial and temporal circumstances. Instead it took a turn to broader socio-political realms concerning the failure of environmental management, the policy taken by the Government or even the issue of the poverty, illiteracy and finally the forum decided that the struggle for environmental wellbeing is nothing but a supplementary struggle for economic and social wellbeing. People participated on the matter with keen interest to find out the solution.

The theatre started with a collage of causes and consequences of global warming at first. Then it enters into the realm of statistical data and left the issue for the audience to participate. The joker presented the statistical data showing the cost for so called development carried out in different developed and developing countries and how much it could be done for the betterment of poor people throughout the world through that money. Then the joker opened the discussion and asked the probable reason for global warming. One of the audience, a middle aged man of around 57 years old stated that it is unplanned development which caused such menace. The joker then asked the possible solution of this. Another person of around 50 said public awareness would be the best possible way. Somebody at this point mentioned about the Chipko Movement during 70s of the last century in India (Figure 8) in this context. The movement absolutely was organized by participation of common people especially the females and was an example of people awareness about the importance of plants. Theatre group performed the Chipko movement accordingly (Figure 9) which was sculptured by that spectator. Now, suddenly another lady about 50 said that the movements like Chipko several other movements were also reported earlier but those are sporadic and localized and at the end oppressor policy finally wins though she agreed that a strong legacy of these movements remain. According to her suggestion group performed the act and showed how the retaliation from state power eventually breaks down the movement. Another audience at this moment justified the reason behind such power retaliation and pointed out that all of these movements usually has a socio economic perspective and these must be interpreted as a political movements also. 'Why do not we?' she said, 'Was not the occupation of those [the participants of Chipko] poor people considered to be chief issue for themselves to participate in that movement? Tree and forest was their main source of earning. Thus environmental movements always have a close relation with economic stability'. Forum also determined that after globalization i.e. after 90s of the last century per se the nexus of big corporates, state power and hooligans became stronger and works hand in hand to destroy such movements. So only peoples' awareness cannot be the only solution of the global warming. There exists the eternal struggle between oppressor and oppressed. Here a lady of 21 years suddenly arose and said that these awareness programmes does not involve people and carried out in an 'air conditioned room'. Thus another trajectory of the forum opened by her statement. It clearly tells that movements must involve people and must not be confined among elite and those who are already aware of the scenario. The first person who started the discussion now again stood up and said only all out movement seems to be the solution. 'Movement of every kind which generates from the basic needs (food, clothing shelter, education and health) or from the trade

issues or any political issues which are driven against state power must involve environmental issue as one of the agendas. Simultaneously any environmental movement must also include socio economic issue as a compulsory part’.

Then the Joker asked the further way out. There was a silence of few minutes. Then an old man of around 60 suddenly guided us. He was originally from a remote village from Murshidabad District, West Bengal, India. He and his family along with other few families now stay at Kolkata. By profession they are labours of real estate companies. He was a tribal person. He drank a bit and we noticed him singing something, a tune of tribal melody. We asked him about what he was singing. He replied that it was a song he listened earlier. We found that the song was ‘Gaon Chorab nehi’ (We shall not leave our mother village).

‘At such a time when uncertainty surrounds the tribals and other traditional forest dwellers, the song ‘Gaon Chhodab Nahin’, inspired by Bhagwan Maajhi, leader of the Adivasi struggle against the bauxite mining in Kashipur serves as a cry of resistance against the lofty ideals of development’, said ICF Team (2019).

The song is as follows from which anybody can easily assume the spirit of the movement.

We will not leave our village, or our jungles, or our mother earth.

We will not give up our fight

They built dams, drown villages and built factories. They cut down forests, dug out mines and built sanctuaries.

Without water, land and forest where do we go?

Oh, God of development, we pray, tell us how to save our lives?

Dry is the Jamuna river, the Narmada River and the Suvarnarekha river.

Ganga River is a dirty drain, Krishna river but a black line!

You may drink your colas and bottled water, how shall we quench our thirst with such polluted water?

Were our ancestors fools that they conserved the forest?

Made the land so green, made the rivers flow like honey?

Your greed has charred the land and looted its greenery!

The fish are dead, the birds have flown, who knows where?

The minister has become industry's broker, snatched away our lands!

Armed battalions protect them!

The officeris king and the contractor is a millionaire!

Our village is their colony!

Unite and break the silence!

Fisherfolk, Daits, and adivasis unite!

From fields and mines arise sound the nagara!

Listen, people of the country, struggle is the only way out!’

After that suggestion the group instantly searched the song from internet, played it through sound system. The whole audience joined the programme. The area suddenly transformed into a spirited artistic extravaganza, a rehearsal place of future battle ground, a trumpet of alarm to the oppressor, ‘Listen, people of the country, struggle is the only way out!’ (Figure 10) By the time WE finished their drawing, where also the audience participants put their touch with pen and colour (Figure 11). The programme finished with immense triumphant spirit.

## Discussion

There are few issues to discuss regarding the current study. First of all why it is an inevitable consequence of environmental movements to be converted into liberation movements of mankind. Secondly, what is the importance and credibility of artistic involvement in building up the awareness among people. Let us sum it up step by step.

But before entering into the detail, the interpretation of statistical data requires a few words to be stated. The participation of youth in the theatre group is obviously a matter of enthusiasm while audience participation chiefly comprised of the middle adult age group. Elder people see the scenario more vivid by their own experience than the younger people. Elder people thus finds the solution of a problem more efficiently while youth is more active than aged ones when they understand the fact (Haugestad et.al., 2021; Boulianne et. al., 2020; Sloam, 2016 Vromen et. al., 2016). The participation of male and female in art group was almost same. Probable reason behind the lower percentage of female audience was due to the time selected for the programme when it was either cooking time or time for other domestic works where mostly the females were engaged. Besides it was the prime time for watching TV programmes which are also have huge attraction among the ladies. The addiction of female TV viewers for entertainment programmes particularly serials have already been reported by Marik (2021); Priyakumari, and Mariappan (2020). Our study thus revealed about the gender equity in activism in one hand and opined great concern about the less participation of females due to mere entertainment addiction. Literacy is an important factor for environmental awareness (Jiang et. al., 2023; Agfar et. al., 2018). Our study supports the view but simultaneously it also established that if the issue of poverty and daily struggle could be linked with the environmental awareness the environmental movement can be generated automatically through the active participation of the so called illiterate audience (c/f the old man who suggested the last act). No separate venture for any exclusive environmental awareness is then needed at all. Moreover, it is the trend worldwide that poor people are responsible for environmental degradation and there is close relationship between poverty and environmental degradation. Yes it is true to some extent but if we look at the other side of the coin we find another story. According to a report, 'The top 100 fossil fuel companies are responsible for 71% of global greenhouse emissions since 1998. But the fossil fuel industry is not the only one damaging the environment. Other large corporations, such as Coca-Cola, Apple and Ikea, also have a detrimental effect on the environment' (Marsh, 2020).

Many of the companies causing the most damage around the world have their headquarters in the UK, EU and USA (Global Witness, 2021; Jowit, 2010). Therefore blaming poverty for environmental degradation is definitely an attempt for sublimation of the true fact and offensive excuse by the big corporates. India as we know is growing in a steady state to be a giant in economic world. There is a huge market of not only the rich people but nowadays, 'people's buying habits do not necessarily correspond to their income, as had always been the assumption. People, who once could only desire for luxury, have now come to own it' (Acharya and Nirjar, 2016). This is certainly the result of increasing consumerism in the society which in turn directly proportional to the profit making machinery of the corporates. The fact corroborates with this view regarding the responsible sectors of pollutants from Indian perspective (Ganguly et. al. 2021). In consequence we observe that the more the pollution the more expenditure is incurred to mitigate it. A lot of money is therefore drained for environmental wellbeing (Notes on Demands for Grants, 2023-2024. 2023). 'In 2023-24, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change has been allocated Rs 3,079 crore, a 24% increase over

the revised estimates of 2022-23. This comprises of Rs 2,934 crore for revenue expenditure (95%) and Rs 145 crore for capital expenditure (5%)’ states PRS Legislative Research (2023). Therefore every effort and measure taken are for cure but not prevention and furthermore, this amount of money is gathered from the tax payers. Thus a vicious cycle of consumerism, corporate profit and pollution load is increasing (Figure 12). Without proper and radical policy change or change of the whole system this cannot be mitigated (Kaur, 2023) and for this a collective and all-out movement is necessary (Doran et.al., 2023; Furlong, and Vignoles, 2021) which the forum stated clearly. Moreover it clearly showed that lower middle class and middle class are the effective soldiers to fight against pollution. Ritu Sarin has reported about such struggle at Buxwaha forest, India. (Sarin, 2023) The issue of environmental degradation is nothing but an issue of oppression as participants opined.

But why cultural practice or practice of direct participation can enhance awareness? The statement and doctrine of Boal may show the reason in a lucid way as he said,

‘It is not the place of the theatre to show the correct path, but only to offer the means by which all possible paths may be examined’.

He further stated,

‘The rehearsal stimulates the practice of the act in reality. Forum theatre, as well as these other forms of a people’s theatre, instead of taking something away from the spectator, evoke in him a desire to practice in reality the act he has rehearsed in the theatre’ (Boal, 2000).

‘Its aim is always to stimulate debate (in the form of action, not just words), to show alternatives, to enable people “to become the protagonists of their own lives”. Having used Forum Theatre myself with a variety of different communities in Britain, I can testify to its efficacy, both as a way of using theatre to make sense of life and as a means of giving people the strength and confidence to overcome their oppressions’, says Adrian Jackson (Boal, 1992).

Imagine a theatre show in which we, the artists, would present our world view in the first half, and in the second half the audience could create a new world, invent their own future by trying out their own options (Boal, 1992). Jana Sanskriti(JS) Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed in their mission statement says,

‘members of the theatre team select, construct, and narrate a social problem from their daily life. With artistic direction this play is taken to an audience who must now find a solution to the problem. Passive spectators then become engaged spect-actors. Spect-actors come on stage to enact the solutions they have thought of, debating with trained activists about the feasibility of the solutions suggested. Thus individuals publicly engage in tackling a problem that has thus far provoked the most profound cultural silence and acceptance. This exercise gradually suggests possibilities for liberation from that oppression in real life’ (Jana Sanskriti(JS) Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed, 2023).

In our study also we found audience stepped up and suggested, debated and made the image using the theatre group. According to Boal the theatre group creates the real image while spec-actors (Dr. Sanjoy Ganguly, Director, JS coined the term spect-activist instead of spect-actor) creates the ideal image which we found in the case of creating the image replica of Chipko movement discussed earlier. Director, Applied Theatre India Foundation, Shri Kaustubh Bankepure opined,

‘The purpose of Applied Theatre is to make people aware about their real issues and help them explore the best possible way to deal with it. Applied Theatre is gaining importance worldwide because it deals with a

tremendous amount of hope and possibility of exploration to deal with issues in a very positive way’ (India Education Diary Bureau Admin, 2020).

Zhang and Chen (2018) opined

‘As an effective supplement for market failure and government failure, public participation is an important power for environmental supervision. Effective public participation is strongly encouraged for environmental supervision. To promote public participation, environmental education among the public is essential, since public awareness can facilitate positive public participation’.

In this case Forum theatre method was proved to be an effective way to enhance public participation.

If we enter deeper into the bio-sociological domain we may find more scientific answer. It is worthy to mention that both selfish and anthropocentric approach to nature or environment is detrimental for the sustainability. Hence altruistic behavior and empathy is needed for the environmental wellbeing. Now, empathy and altruism are closely linked with cooperation which has a long history in human evolution since more than hundred thousand years. ‘Explaining the evolution of cooperation by natural selection has been a major theme of evolutionary biology since Darwin’ (Nowak et. al., 2004). Natural selection always favours cooperation and empathy (Ruffle and Sosis, 2007; Nowak and Sigmund, 2005). The cultural practice has a significant role to facilitate the social cooperation which has an evolutionary trend inherited by the protohumans from their ancestral species (Fink et. al., 2021; De Gregorio et. al., 2021). The influence of rituals (argued to be the predecessor of modern art forms) has been stated by (Rossano, 2012) Effect of artistic behavior on neurological and genetic level or vice versa is also proved earlier (McDermott, 2023; Magsamen, 2023 Tarr et.al., 2014). Therefore it is evident that theatrical or group drawing would be the best practice.

The present study thus intends to conclude that artistic engagement especially the theatre of the oppressed enhance peoples participation in one hand and in the other hand the article focus that no so called environmental movement can be successful without involving economic or political issues merged with the issues of environmental issues.

### **Conclusion:**

The study has bring forth few important issues. The participation of youth and equity of gender are certainly a bright side of the society regarding environmental awareness campaign. When struggle of daily economic stability and wellbeing is included poverty and illiteracy does not matter to protect environment. The increasing consumerism is one of the chief factors for environmental degradation where big corporates and state power are involved. Thus in one hand Government policies are encouraging the consumerism and on the other hand it expend more money to mitigate the environmental erosion which seems to be a never ending equilibrium of degradation and recover. Artistic involvement is a useful way for more and more people’s participation which in turn enhances the awareness. The influence of art on human mind or to be specific it’s neurological and hormonal state is already stated which mankind inherited from their ancestors. Thus involvement of art is no longer a subjective or emotional affair but a serious matter supported by science.

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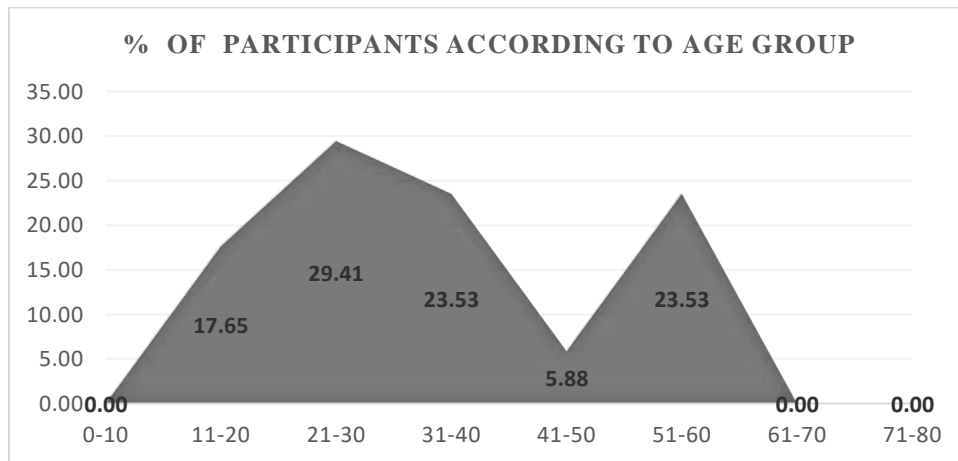


Figure 1. Participants according to age group (in Percentage)

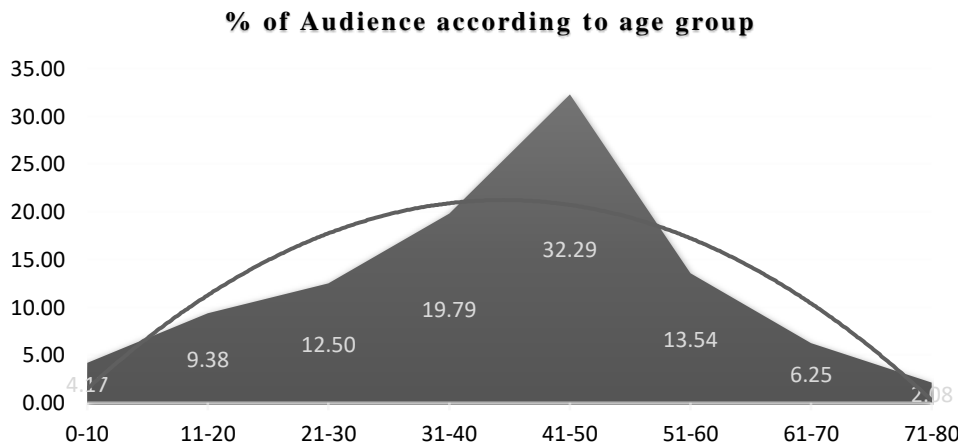
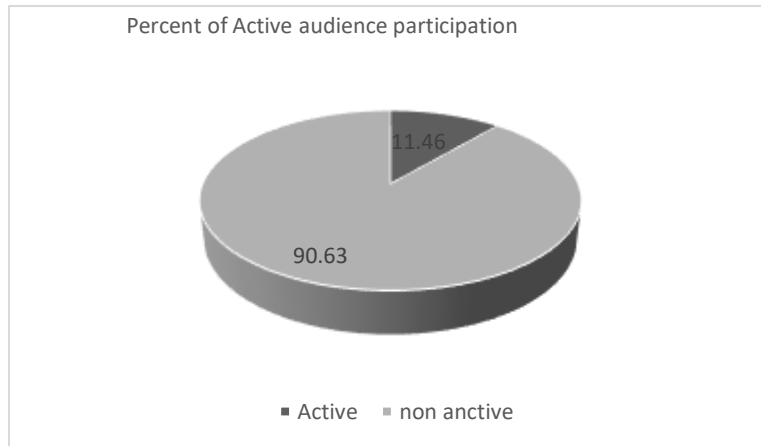
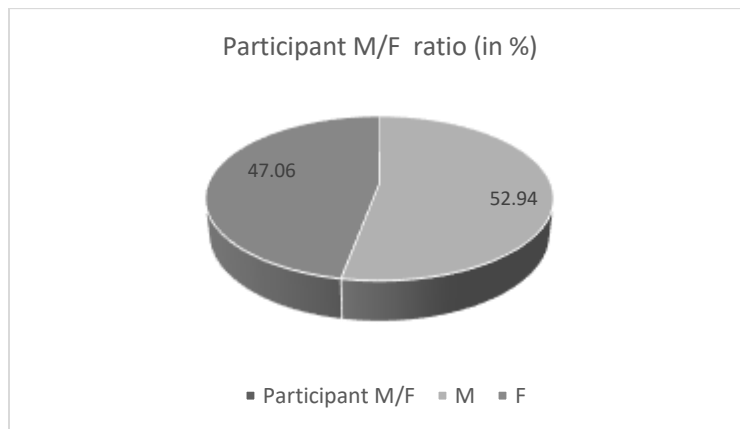


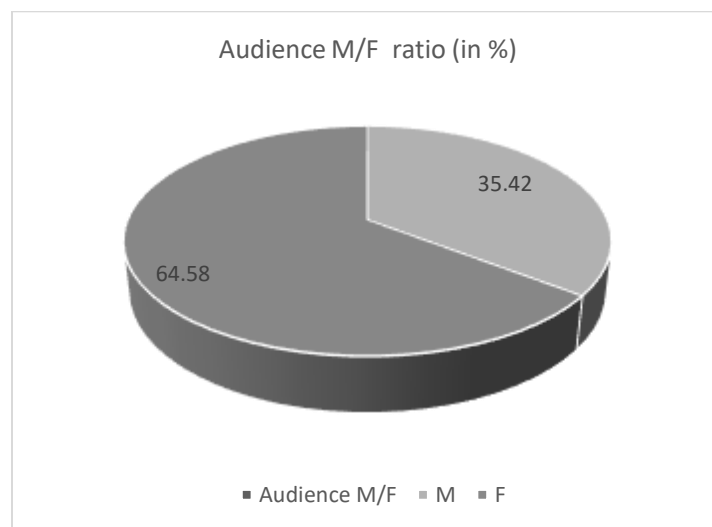
Figure 2. Audience according to age group (in Percentage)



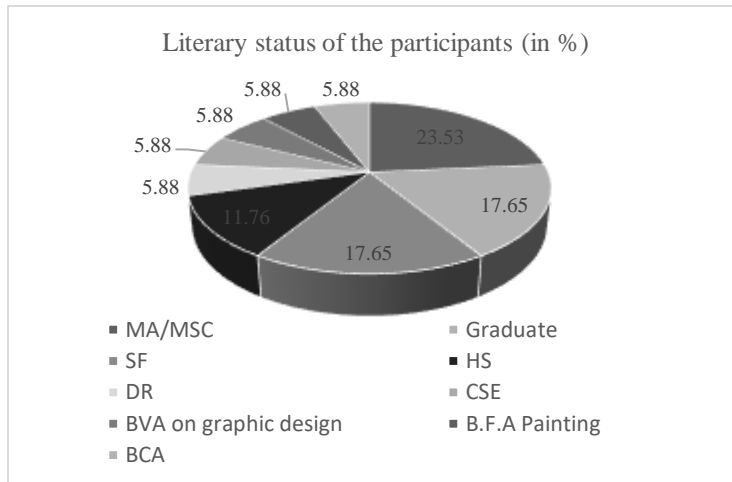
**Figure 3. Active audience participation (in Percentage)**



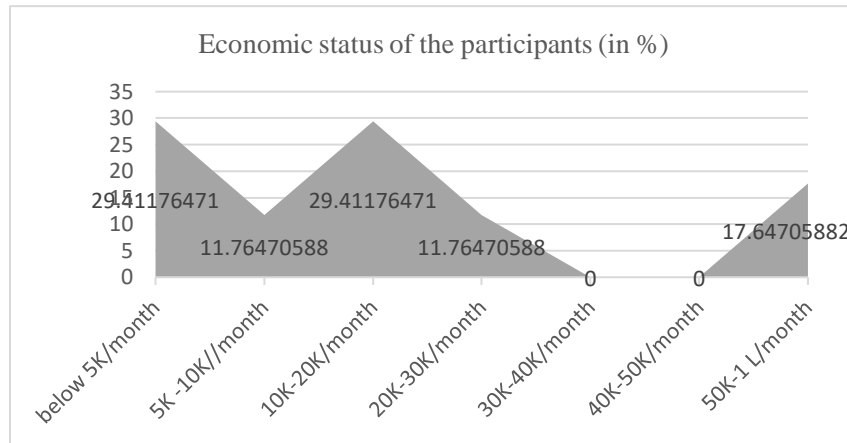
**Figure 4. Participant M/F ratio (in Percentage)**



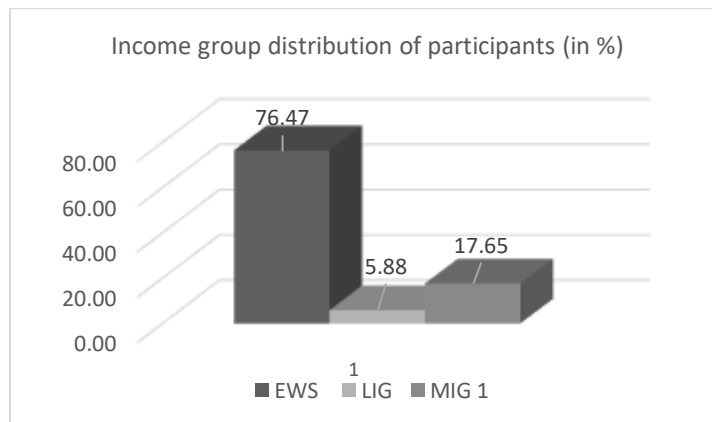
**Figure 5. Audience M/F ratio (in Percentage)**



**Figure 6. Literary status of the participants (in Percentage)**



**Figure 7 a. Economic status of the participants (in Percentage)**



**Figure 7 b. Income group distribution of participants (in Percentage)**

(Source: Clicbrics. 2023. <https://www.clicbrics.com/blog/different-income-groups-and-which-one-do-you-fit-in>)



**Fig. 8. Chipko Movement**

(Source: <https://www.google.com/search?q=chipko+movement&oq=&aqs=chrome.1.69i59i45018.1044335947j0j15&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8#imgsrc=q05u8PhByAn09M&imgdii=Vr4MYHkHyLHqaM>)



**Fig. 9. Theatrical representation of Chipko Movement**

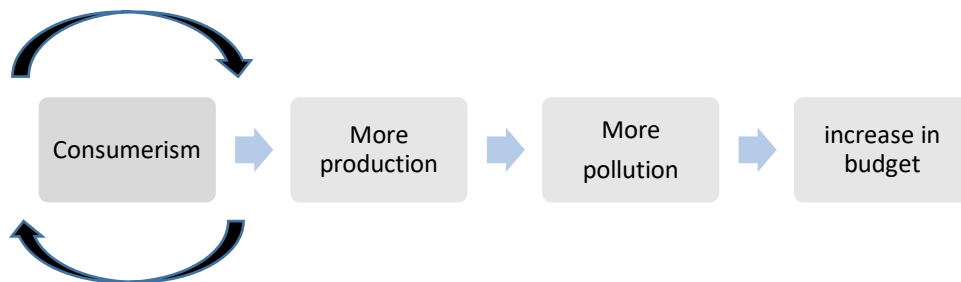


**Fig. 10. The culmination of the forum by group dancing and singing (The marked man suggested the song).**





**Fig. 11. The installation.**



**Figure 12. The model of nexus.**