

BE CAREFUL

PRESS REVIEW



A PERFORMANCE BY AND WITH

MALLIKA TANEJA

P.2 - **The Indian woman using her body to fight for equality**

BBC India – December 2017

P.5 - **Alchemy 2016: 'Be Careful' – Mallika Taneja's thought-provoking 'updressing'**

Asian Culture vulture – May 2016

P.6 - **Mallika Taneja Tackles Sexual Violence In Her Theatrical Protest 'Thoda Dhyan Se'**

Homegrown – April 2016

P.9 - **Subversion has no clothes**

The Hindu Businessline – February 2016

P.11 - **In Her Skin: Mallika Taneja on feminism and her play Thoda Dhyan Se**

The Indian Express – November 2015

P.13 - **Exactly how much is rape-proof clothing?**

The Times of India – December 2013

The Indian woman using her body to fight for equality

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CLAUDIA PAJEWSKI

Imagine a young woman beginning a performance standing naked on a stage. In conservative Indian society, it is very hard to imagine but for playwright and actor Mallika Taneja, the body is the most powerful tool in the battle for women's equality. She told the BBC's Ayeshea Perera what motivates her.

"The first time I performed naked in a truly public space ...it was great fun. "There was a camera person there and if you watch his footage you can see a jerk when the lights come on because he literally fell over in shock. And someone in the audience said 'Aiyo!'," Mallika Taneja recalls, laughing.

But although it is the most talked about aspect of her play, the 33-year-old says nudity is not the point of her piece. *Thoda Dhyan Se* (Be a little careful) is meant to provoke people into thinking about whether women's clothing really has any correlation with sexual violence.

It is also, in a sense, an expression of something she says motivates a lot of her work - the impact of a single body in any given situation.



"What does it take for a group to be dispersed? Just one person dissenting. "A single body can stand in the middle of a crowd and bring it to a halt," she says. "For example, if a group of people are running one way, all it takes is just one person running the other way to disrupt the flow."

The opening scene - where she stands naked and looks at her audience for a full eight minutes - is an example of that. In every performance she has done in the last four years, she says, those first minutes have been met with a silence that "fills the room".

In that moment, Ms Taneja adds, as she watches her audience watch her, she is aware that although outnumbered, she is the most powerful body in that space. But she is also the most vulnerable. "As a woman in particular, I find the entire concept fascinating. What is it about our bodies that terrifies people so much, that it always has to be hidden away and regulated?"

Performing naked on stage is still an unnerving experience for her. She is very strict about not allowing mobile phones and other recording devices inside the hall. Notably, in the four years that she has performed the play, not a single photograph or video of her nudity has surfaced online. As the play goes on, Ms Taneja wears more and more clothes, even putting on a helmet at some point, each time explaining to her audience that as a woman, she needs to "be a little careful".



"Be a little careful" is a phrase which though often used with concern, is still a subtle form of victim shaming in cases of sexual assault. Women are often asked why were they out that late at night? Why were they alone with men? Why were they dressed a certain way? They are constantly told that if something happens to them, then they are also partially responsible, that they should have "been a little careful".

It is this attitude that Ms Taneja is attempting to challenge, using her own body as a weapon. "Women identify with the piece easily, but what is important is that many men say it has been an eye-opener for them. Some of them say that after watching the play, they feel horrible about being male. But that is not the point of my piece, it's not to make them feel bad, it's to start conversations."

Her preference for solo work is partly inspired by her own lifestyle. Ms Taneja is unmarried, lives by herself and does not work a regular nine-to-five job but pays her own bills through her theatre work.

She concedes that success, and the financial security that has come with it, has given her a lot more power to resist.

"No-one - not my father, no-one in my family - questions my lifestyle or my work," she says. This sort of fiercely independent existence is not as rare as it once was, but is still by no means the norm in India. If unmarried, many women would be expected to continue living in their parental homes.

But it is exactly this type of rebellion - unseen yet significant - that is seeing so many young Indian women come out of the shadows and assert their rights. And this is what Ms Taneja says she also tries to capture in her work. "We do have the power to say no. Yes there will be consequences, and it is easier for some of us to do it than others, but finally it is up to us. If we don't say no to the things happening to us, who will?"



If a woman says no even once, she adds, then they will have made their contribution to the cause of equality. And while she acknowledges the importance of larger movements to bring people together, she reiterates that finally, change will only happen when the individual has decided to take a stand.

In 2012, India saw that happen. The horrific Delhi gang rape prompted hundreds of thousands of women to come out on to the streets, shouting that they had put up with enough. India's tough new rape laws and a complete change in the way rape was reported and talked about, were direct consequences of that anger.

Ms Taneja's play was prompted by her own anger towards a similar case that took place a year later in Mumbai when a photojournalist was gang-raped while on assignment. "What is the fight for? Our bodies and everything they carry," she says. She does get asked some tough questions though.



A lot of women who have watched her play ask her if she would have performed the piece if she had not been slim. "I don't know the answer to that. This is the body I have always had. All I can say to them is 'I hope so'. But having said that, I am aware that I have a type of body that is more 'acceptable' to society," she says thoughtfully. She concedes that with every performance it has become easier, and standing in front of strangers is always better than seeing someone she knows in the audience.

But there are still off days. "Sometimes I just don't feel good. Sometimes I have my period. But I still have to go out there, stand up straight and do it," she says. "But it is my body and I refuse to lose control of it."

Alchemy 2016: 'Be Careful' – Mallika Taneja's thought-provoking 'updressing'

Dimple Pau
May 29, 2016



" Being a woman is a challenge in some situations but as one artist demonstrates, the very condition of being one involves certain unconscious manoeuvres all the time..."

THE LIGHTS go out, and when switched back on, the audience is taken on a journey.

A journey starting with an bespoke inner dialogue as we the audience are stared at by a woman (Mallika Taneja) wearing nothing but a pure smile. After a long moment that feels an eternity, Mallika begins her monologue while simultaneously dressing herself in layers of garments from shorts and jeans to scarves and dresses.

This is a brave, powerful and raw performance that is one of those pieces of art that will never be forgotten for anyone in that room. Through appearing naked on stage and dressing her blank canvased body, she challenges the notion that clothes are a factor in women getting raped.

The monologue, with comedic under tones, brings to life the very real conflicts and battles women all over the world face. The responsibilities, the fears, the unwanted attention from men and the wanted attention from the 'right' men. The layers and layers of clothes she puts on finely mirrors the layers and layers that make up being a woman.

It all comes together the moment she says the words 'Be Careful' as something her father would say to her before she leaves the house.

Fear is the running theme throughout and the current reputation of Delhi means the fear for women in India is more than it's ever been. She speaks in child-like, innocent tones and captivates every single person in the room. Mallika's 20-minute performance does more for feminism than lectures and books.

The post-performance tea and discussion articulated the different responses and feelings the audience had – but the unanimous response was awe. This could arguably be one of the most important pieces of Alchemy 2016.

AVC Rating *** (out of five)**

Mallika Taneja performed 'Be Careful' ('Thoda Dhyaan Se') at the Southbank Centre as part of Alchemy on Sunday, May 22 2016.

Mallika Taneja Tackles Sexual Violence In Her Theatrical Protest 'Thoda Dhyan Se'

April 26, 2016

"Whenever I go out of the house, my father always tells me – Bye beta! Have fun! Be careful."

There has been a sudden resurgence of political and protest theatre in India over the past few years. A lot of these performances are done by female theatre personalities, catalyzed by growing sexual violence against women. There is prevailing discontent in society and a sense that the sources of information available to the masses often fail to grapple with existing realities.

Theatre artist Mallika Taneja takes an active stance of protest in her 10 minute satirical sketch 'Thoda Dhyan Se/Be Careful.' In her performance, she satirizes the advice given to women on how to 'avoid' the wandering male gaze and 'prevent rape' and sexual violence by adjusting the way they dress. Taneja's sketch is reactionary to the Shakti Mills gangrape case of a photojournalist, in 2013, and was developed two years ago, at the Tadpole Repertory, in New Delhi.



Image source: www.jaipurwomenblog.com

We reached out to Mallika Taneja to understand how she developed her piece; how she gained the courage to stand in front of an audience in her lingerie and to get her opinion on society today, the media and how much clothing really is enough? A question she throws at the audience by the end of her performance.

"There was an article I had read about how everyone is so interested in what the woman was wearing, who she was with, why she was there... but no one seemed to ask the same questions of the men who raped her. Who were they? Why were they there? What were THEY wearing? The piece has evolved since then and all performances, discussions, feedbacks and opportunities have contributed to its evolution," Taneja explains.

Born to parents active in theatre, Taneja studied English Literature at Kirori Mal College, Delhi University, where she learnt her greatest lessons in life and theatre.

The reason for the increase in incidents of sexual violence and eve-teasing, as stated by a [certain legislator](#) in our country, is the western influence of wearing short dresses and skirts by women. Which, according to them, titillates young men forcing them to act out. Aptly put by [Youngistan](#), the belief then is that it's girls who tease men by wearing skimpy dresses who, in turn, tease them; it's the girls fault. Various comments like these have been made with reactionary pieces in the arts, such as 'The Walk' by Maya Krishna Rao, following the Nirbhaya rape case. "It moves you and leaves you thinking for days on end," says Taneja, about Maya Krishna Rao's piece. Taneja's performance is nothing less than thought provoking and a deep critical analysis of the Indian mindset.

'Thoda Dhyaan Se/Be Careful' starts with Taneja standing on stage in lingerie, surrounded by various articles of clothing. Starting her monologue she dresses herself, layer upon layer, getting ready to go out. Tongue-in-cheek, she talks about the need, being a girl, to cover up her body, as she piles on more clothes. Standing in lingerie, silently on a stage can't be easy. When she was invited to the Zurich Theatre Spektakel earlier in August, she went from being in lingerie to being nude.

"I had an opportunity to try things that I wouldn't even imagine doing in India. What does it mean to stand in front of a white audience in underwear? Very little. Whereas in India, it does push the audience into dealing with this person in front of you with very little on, in the West, it has no such effect. But I had also started finding it difficult to make sense of the beginning of the piece as it was...not just for the audience abroad but also for India. It made sense to get rid of the underwear... to begin with absolutely no codes on the body."

Indian society loves to criticize anyone who doesn't follow the prescribed cultural conduct and norms, especially women. Taneja dressing herself in a public arena, sounds like an open invitation for unending backlash and that's exactly where we began our off-the-cuff Q & A.

HG: Have you faced any such harsh reactions and criticism for this piece?

MT: "Yes I have. Some newspapers in Jaipur called me 'ashleel' after the performance at the Jaipur Theatre Festival, in December last year. But honestly, these are stray incidents. Largely, the reactions I have gotten till now has been overwhelmingly positive, the discussions after performances have been vibrant, and I have been invited to many places to perform. I think these are the true markers of what people think about the piece. This is when I was still in my underwear. It's tougher and more complicated to find performances now... but the response remains similar."

HG: In the last few years, do you think anything has really changed in the manner with which rape and sexual abuse cases are being dealt with, and spoken about in the country?

MT: "Dealt with... I don't know. The problem runs deep. Violence against women, in thought and in action, cannot be erased with such ease... it requires continuous intervention and education. But something has changed for sure. Many people have spoken up, the feminist debate has picked up and moved forward. Everyday there is something about women that we read or watch... this was not the case before. People do care a little bit more... a lot more actually. Women want their freedom."

In her opinion, everything begins with education; people need to be educated and sensitized to handle rape cases and survivors of sexual attacks in a proper and respectful manner; members of the media, the government and police officials alike.

"I wonder if mainstream media deals with anything at all in the right way today. Even though there are some reporters who are fearless with their opinion and words and deal with issues that keeps the dignity of the the survivor intact, the bulk of reporting seems to be running after ratings. I think they need to stop shouting at us and each other, and start talking, start listening. Maybe then some fruitful conversations would emerge," she elaborates.



Image source: Times of India

HG: Women, on several occasions, have been told how to dress and behave in order to ‘protect’ themselves. If you could say something or give one piece of advice to women of the country, what would that be?

MT: “Well, according to [Smriti Irani](#) this is just not true! Haven’t you heard? I don’t think I can give advice... I can tell you what I try to do. No matter who tells you how to be or how it is, don’t blindly believe them. Question at every step and form your own opinion and encourage your kids to do the same. No matter who it is – your teachers, parents, the government, their truth is not yours. Form your own and learn to coexist. This is far easier said than done. But we can all try.”

HG: And how about to the men?

MT: “I’d say the same! And also, just remember that men and women are equal. Okay?”

Practitioners of political and protest theatre attempt to subvert the catharsis experienced by their audience. Certain emotions needs to be left unresolved, they need to be left unsettled in order to force social and political action in the the real world.

“In my opinion, catharsis alone has no place in the world of the arts anymore. If the arts become a vehicle for only catharsis, it will fail its function. Although it could be a starting point for some work, it must move on from that – it must change its audience. It must make an audience think. It must transform minds. For both who create it and those who watch it. This is the role that I think the arts play in society. The change that follows is inevitable,” says Taneja.

In India, a woman’s action and behaviour is dictated by society, whether we like it or not. Don’t go out at night, don’t drink or smoke, don’t have male friends, don’t go out at night and drink or smoke with male friends you’re not supposed to have, and of course, dress modestly. The rules for women seem simple, but their existence, in the first place, is not. You deviate from the rules and you face the consequences, even if the consequence is a violent attack. At a time when women are still being blamed for the actions of men, it’s women like Mallika Taneja who are using their position and role as artists to push forward and enact changes in a patriarchal and rigid society.

Subversion has no clothes

P ANIMA
February 5, 2016

A shard of a play that is a political choice, a protest — one that fractures the conventional relationship between actor and spectator



Photo : Kamal Narang – Business Line

Mallika Taneja's newest stage is a 12th-floor apartment in Greater Noida, a suburb 50 km from the Capital where skyscrapers are the real inhabitants. A small carpet on the floor is her performance space. Clothes, enough to fill a trunk and her only prop, hang from lampshades and a house ladder. More are neatly stacked on a chair and stool. A small table lamp contributes to the lighting.

The audience, a little over two dozen, is mostly academics and university students. They are perched on durries, cushions, beds, chairs and sofas, and at least some of them know what to expect. Taneja has taken *Thoda Dhyan Se*, a shard of a play that bruises with its silence and mocks with its black humour, wherever her audiences will have it. But some things never change. Like the heavy silence when she walks in naked. As she stands and looks at each of us straight in the eye, the conventional relationship between the actor and the spectator fractures. The actor appears comfortable in her nudity, but it challenges the audience. One earnestly meets her gaze. Another looks away. The third watches, mouth agape. The fourth, shoulders slouched, smiles a casual smile. Gazes wander all over her body. Taneja can feel them all. "Whatever the gaze may be, I have to be doing what I'm doing. I make sure I'm not offended by any of it. I'm very in with the fact that they are no hermits. I have to give them time to deal with the fact that there's a naked body in the room and what's the big deal about it," says Taneja.

She stands and then turns slightly as minds and minutes tick away. She stands till the breathing around her becomes normal. Till the abruptness of the nudity wears off. Till, as she says, "What's the big deal" becomes a flickering thought in the head. Then she smiles, a smile so beguiling, that the audience is relieved to give it back. She is still naked. But now it's no more about nudity. The anonymous naked body has become the smiling person. And then she intones, "*Thoda dhyan se*" (Be careful). Taneja crushes the potent silence of nudity with a monologue that works itself into frenzy. She talks about being in tune with the 'atmosphere' of a place. About being home before dark. About not telling anyone much about you, so that no one really knows you and cannot blame you for anything. Each *dupatta* she ties around herself, the tops, shorts, socks and gloves she wears, one on top of another, smothers the person who stood before us a few minutes back. A lifetime's advice of 'be careful' makes her a scarecrow. She exchanges individuality for anonymity, if that will keep her safe. Finally, she puts

on a helmet. When not an inch of flesh is visible, she says, "If something happens despite all this, you can at least say it's not my fault."

Seated in the balcony of her south Delhi home, between spoonfuls of dal-chawal, Taneja talks of how *Thoda Dhyan Se* started. "Years of being told these things. Years of people watching, touching, looking. Years of being a woman in the city." It was one experiment among many she and her friends at The Tadpole Repertory were working on four years ago. But this particular work grew each time she performed it — in her innerwear, before friends, artistes and acquaintances in small spaces. "Who knew what this play had," she says.

The Zurich Theatre Spektakel sent her an invitation. And Taneja reached out to veteran Maya Krishna Rao to work and rework the piece. They decided to do away with the innerwear. "I just stopped having answers to why I'm doing it that way." Being naked became the only way to do; once she was convinced, nudity was just a part of it. "I have understood, emotionally, at a gut level, even if I cannot articulate it exactly, that this is the only way to do it. The rest of it is figuring out how." A lot of figuring out, at that. "Strength comes in the doing. You can be standing in a rehearsal room and doing it. But it is very different to do it in a room full of people. I had to be comfortable with my body and it is a constant process. To a large extent I have said, ' *Dekhenge to dekhenge* — they will also get over it'."



The piece is her political choice — her protest, question and answer. And it is risky. So risky that performance in India is still confined to small communities and festivals. Taneja wants it to reach as many as possible, so she has kept both the old and new versions alive. She performed it in Jantar Mantar, under a tree, on December 16 the year before last. The audience stood around as she performed in her innerwear, in a space that guaranteed no security and lacked the sanctity of theatre. "My voice couldn't carry. I had to use a mike."

"I'm okay to perform anywhere." And last month she got her biggest stage so far. In Sankar Venkateswaran she found a curator willing to take the risk. *Thoda Dhyan Se* was the final performance at the International Theatre Festival of Kerala. For Taneja ITFoK was a turning point; that she could perform at a government festival with the State machinery aiding her is subversion at its best. She is appreciative of the audience, about 300 of them, who had no clue what was in store when they walked into the Black Box. She calls it a 'moment', when something shifted for the theatre and the audience. "They could have not let this happen. They might have disagreements with me. But they didn't stop the show. They let people have their voice and they will debate it later. You cannot ask for a better response. When you let your counterpoint play itself out, there is true co-existence."

Taneja is set to start work on a piece with Shubham Vardhan on the politics of memory and forgetting. She is also gearing up for the 24-hour walk, her piece at the upcoming walk festival. *Thoda Dhyan Se*, her experiment at subversion, will happen as long as she goes about it smartly. 'Careful' is, ironically, what her friends tell her when she sets out to perform.

In Her Skin: Mallika Taneja on feminism and her play Thoda Dhyan Se

Written by Dipanita Nath
November 1, 2015

Thoda Dhyan Se is a feminist satire targetting those who link women's clothes to their abuse.



In the hours before her play, Mallika Taneja was making sure “the event would unfold without any drama” and nobody would get arrested. *Thoda Dhyan Se* is a piece that took place at a south Delhi studio on October 11, weeks after the actor won an award at Zurich Theatre Spectakel for staging an English-language version of the play called *Be Careful*.

Thoda Dhyan Se is funny and difficult, as well as the boldest play in Delhi at the moment. Taneja, 31, plays a young girl who is dressing up as she chats about what women should wear to avoid the wrong kind of attention. “Pata hai na zamana kharab hai?” she says, as she ties dupattas around her torso and groin. “Agar aap zamane ko bolney ka mauka nahi denge na, toh zamana bol nahi payega,” she adds, frenetically pulling on pairs of shorts, wearing dresses over multiple tops, covering her feet with layers of socks and padding her throat with scarves.

The girl’s breathless banter is as loaded as the clothes with which she obsessively covers herself. Some of the monologue is drawn from online tips on “How to be safe in Delhi” in which ridiculous advice masquerades as common sense. The audience begins to see simple, everyday streetwear as weapons of oppression and familiar phrases, such as “thoda dhyan se”, turn into patriarchal cues to enforce subservience.

At an intimate screening, there was heavy silence as the hall adjusted its perception of the experience. The audience comprised academicians, performers, art students and various artistes to whom nudity was no novelty — but nobody was ready for it to stare them back in the face. Finally, Taneja gave a wide grin, looked around and trilled, “Thoda dhyan se rehna chahiye.”

It was risky theatre even when Taneja performed the play in her undergarments for two years. Several organisers backed off, fearing charges of obscenity. Now, she’s even got rid of the bra and panty in the reworked version. By appearing in her skin, the actor starts free from sartorial regulations. “Am I asking for it, standing there butt naked? Will I deserve it? Let me see,” she says during a discussion after the performance.

The 15-minute piece was created at Tadpole Repertory in 2013, with inputs from actors such as Momo Ghosh. It was born in response to the gangrape of a photojournalist in Mumbai in 2013. “It also happened because of December 16. It happened because, when I used to go to theatre workshops by bus, some man thought it was okay to keep his hand on my

crotch. It happened because, when I was going home from college, some guy fondled my breasts. I am not separate from my art. Everything in my life has led to this," says Taneja.

Taneja's father, Banwari Taneja, is a Sangeet Natak Akademi award winner from Delhi. He has acted in plays by almost every director of repute for more than 35 years, from Ebrahim Alkazi and BV Karanth to Wolfram Mehring and Nadira Zaheer Babbar. "When you have parents who do theatre, you watch a lot of it. I am 31, but I feel that I have been a part of the history of the culture of Delhi. When people talk about a play that happened 15 or 20 years ago, chances are that I have seen it," she says.

Taneja watched Roysten Abel's *Othello in Black and White*, which had won the Fringe First Award at Edinburgh. "I remember the first scene, when the actors stand silently. Then, they move as one person into a Kathakali posture. That, for me, was the magical moment. I was sold to the world of theatre that day," says Taneja. Summer workshops at the National School of Drama followed, but it was when Taneja fared badly in her Class XII Board exams that she began to become what theatre veteran Maya Krishna Rao calls a "politically and socially conscious performer".

She applied to Kirori Mal College (KMC) for graduation under the drama quota. The Players, KMC's campus theatre group, is associated with hard-hitting plays. Plays are adapted, rewritten, overwritten and politically infused until they acquire both social and personal," says Keval Arora, known as the theatre guru of KMC. Arora played a pivotal role in Taneja's evolution as an artiste. "He taught us to relentlessly question both ourselves, our art and the world around us," says Taneja. In college, Taneja directed *Tattoo*, a German play about incest that challenges even veterans. "She balanced the emotional core and formal style. I have yet to see a better production of *Tattoo*," says Arora.

After a series of jobs that had nothing to do with the stage, Taneja's return happened amid a difficult breakup. "At 25, I had no work, no money and no heart because it was smashed to smithereens. I was rehearsing with Neel Chaudhuri's play with Tadpole Repertory called *Taramandal* and it kept me going," she says. Chaudhuri had cast her in the award-winning adaptation of Satyajit Ray's short story *Patol Babu, Film Star*, in multiple roles. A series of productions followed, such as *Ich Bin Fassbinder*, in which Taneja played the protagonist's girlfriend, and *The Winter's Tale*, a critically acclaimed adaptation of William Shakespeare's classic, with Taneja as the bubbly Princess Perdita.

Taneja's other contribution is an initiative called *Lost & Found*, which takes the arts into neighbourhoods of Delhi not associated with cultural activities. The festival, in 2014, was held in community centres of Sarita Vihar, Pitampura and Vasant Kunj. It comprised an array of programmes, from dastangoi and theatre workshops for senior citizens to wall art, music and dance. "Look at the festivals that happen in a city, how many actually belong to the life of the city? What if they don't happen? Will the city miss it?" she says.

Taneja is under her own scrutiny even when she is thinking about her mother, who passed away when she was 10. "I couldn't remember any more how my mother used to sit. This became the starting point of an investigation into memory and its politics. What is it that we remember and what is it that we forget and why does this happen? I did a work in progress on memory and remembering during a summer residency at Gati Dance Studio this year and it could be my next project," says Taneja.

In August this year, when the call came from the Zurich Theatre Spectkel, it gave Taneja the perfect opportunity to relook at the piece. "I asked myself, 'What does it mean to stand in front of a Western audience in an underwear?' It didn't make any sense. I decided to make a lot of changes and asked Maya Krishna Rao to guide me," she says. Rao says Taneja "has an innate talent and she is always searching and trying to understand." "When an actor does that, she becomes a thinking performer and the audience is more interested in what she is saying," says Rao.

After the Zurich show, the actor realised that "the stories we should be carrying out of our country should be of resilience and not of violence and rape". Two women came up to her after the performance and asked, "Is there a feminist scene in India?" "Of course," replied Taneja, "How do you think I am standing here if there wasn't?"

Exactly how much is rape-proof clothing?

Written by Bohni Bandyopadhyay
December 14, 2013



In a darkened auditorium, a red beam of light shows a girl standing in nothing but her lingerie, with that unabashed smile on her face, which you could have only flashed, when you look at yourself in the mirror, while you're alone in a room. But this was different – she stood before a stunned, silent audience, and as the stage lights up, it reveals piles of clothes surrounding her. She picks up the stoles first, and ties several of them on her torso, as she begins her monologue describing how the society thinks that it is important for a girl to dress 'properly' in order to save herself from sexual harassment. She tells the audience, 'Aaj mere office mein party hai... aapko toh dikh hi raha hai ki mujhe kapdon ka kitna shaukh hai... par taiyyar hone ka matlab yeh toh nahi ki aap kuch bhi bedhanga pehenke nikal jaoge? Ladkiyon ko dhyan dena chahiye ki woh kya pehen rahi hain.' The sarcasm rings out clear in her tone. She keeps piling layers of clothes on her – shorts and T-shirts over stoles, salwar over leggings, then a dress, and finally a helmet, and asks, 'Main kaisi lag rahi hoon?'

Mallika Taneja's 10-minute sketch, *Thoda Dhyan Se*, was part of the launch of the campaign *Jurrat*, to mark one year of the Delhi gang-rape, but turned out to be the highlight of the evening. The former Delhi University student is a part of Tadpole Repertory, a city-based theatre company. 'My group was doing a variety show, and I didn't know what to do, how to contribute. And then the Mumbai gang-rape happened. I'm sure our lives changed after the Delhi gang-rape, but what angered me even more was the rape of the photojournalist in Mumbai, and how everyone was talking about how it is important for women to dress in a certain way in order to not invite rape. I read an article by a journalist on this, which really inspired me. Then I decided to make a sketch on this. I felt angry about how absurd it is to blame it on clothes, the time we go out, the company we keep or the people we talk to. That photojournalist had a male for company, it was just six in the evening, and I'm sure she wasn't wearing a bikini – then why was she raped? My sketch is an expression of that anger,' she told us post her performance.

Mallika had contacted the organisers of *Jurrat* to become a part of the campaign and perform her piece. She wants to turn it into a larger show now. "This is just a seed; I want to create a bigger show out of this. I have performed this twice before, but those were parts of a larger variety show, where I had my group members around and I knew the audience that was watching me perform. Going out in front of the audience this time was scary, because I didn't know the people here. It is always uncomfortable for me to step out, onto the stage for this piece, but then, that's the whole point, right?" asks Taneja.