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Gator Adaa harassed during outdoor dance practice

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Gator Adaa, a University of Florida Bollywood dance fusion team was harassed during a rehearsal on Oct. 4. Two white men in their 30s, who might have been intoxicated, interrupted a Gator Adaa practice at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium.

"At first we went along with it, and we're like 'yeah, we'll teach you some moves,'" team member Shaina Panchal said. "But it kind of became rather obnoxious and annoying when one of them decided to jump in when we were actually conducting practice and he decided to kind of make a mockery of our dancing style."

After that, the other man who was standing to the side called Panchal and her teammates over and asked what Gator Adaa was about.

"I answered politely, you know 'we're a Bollywood dance fusion team, we compete nationally,'" the fourth-year health sciences major said. "After that he got really confused he was like, 'Oh,

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you're a Bollywood dance fusion team, then why aren't you in India?"

The man assumed that Bollywood dancing only occurred in India, but Panchal explained that the team was "bringing their passion of Bollywood dancing to America."

The man then responded, "Oh, like [an] invasive species?"

Panchal was shocked and couldn't formulate a response.

"Looking back at it I wish I had at least tried to educate or tried to make him understand in the best way possible that what he said wasn't ok," Panchal said. "I know that this isn't like an isolated incident and this probably happens to someone everyday, but I think my word of advice to anybody would be just to not remain silent, and if you have the opportunity to teach someone and spread cultural awareness on the spot, I feel like it most definitely should be done."

Later that day, on October 4, Panchal made a Facebook post about the encounter. The post has been shared over 293 times and liked over 2,300 times.

Due to difficulties in finding an enclosed space, Gator Adaa has been forced to practice outside.

"I'm not surprised that we had a run-in with some racist individual outside the stadium," Panchal said.

Gator Adaa has explored other places to practice other than outside the stadium, according to team co-captain Isha Kothari.

There are two dance rooms in the Reitz Union, but those are always booked for the entire semester and are relatively small, making them unsafe for stunts. On top of that, because Gator Adaa is part of the Indian Students Association at UF, all requests had to go through them, creating more barriers to getting a space.

"No matter how hard we pushed to try and get the room it would always fall through," Panchal said.

Spaces such as the Broward basement charge \$150 per booking, which the team could not afford because they have three practices a week, according to Kothari.

"It's not fair that we're forced to practice outside, especially all of last year; even if it's raining, it's really cold, around January, February time all of us, all the different teams, have to practice



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outside for long amounts of time, and that’s just because we can’t reserve rooms,” Kothari said.

Every semester, when the political parties put out their platforms, members of teams like Gator Aada suggest more enclosed dance spaces for dance teams.

“We believe in taking this as far as it needs to go,” Kothari said.

As far as the next steps, Panchal has already met with the director of Asian Pacific Islander American Affairs, Krystie T. Nguyen, to fill out a bias education report and discuss emailing Vice President of Student Affairs David Parrott, who will be setting up a meeting with both Nguyen and Panchal next week. They will talk about how to prevent this from happening in the future and possibly finding a space to practice inside.

“There’s no reason for us to be subject to racial slurs and ignorance just because we’re a smaller minority team,” Kothari said.

Featured image courtesy of Shaina Panchal’s Facebook page.

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