

-up comic Shazia Mirza entertains city with her bawdy jokes and jibes on identity and religion

n Britain with love, and laughter

Common racial abuse in Britain is 'You Paki! to India.' This ice-cold British stand-up comic, at her first-ever gig, is an instant hit. "I saw 'Paki go home!' on the walls, I knew it was time for me. It was time for the Pakistani-origin, brown woman.

Shazia Mirza, who has been heckled in London with hate mail for a woman performer, spent an incident-less evening in Mumbai. She wasn't on the stage or issued a warning (she jokes she's moving forward to that because she got Salman Khan's wife!). "Asians laugh at themselves, but we're concerned about what the audience would re-say about her show. We do have a sense of humour if it's different

we wouldn't have worried. Her audience — mostly glitterati lovers — was attentive and politely. She was asked



UK-based Pakistani comic Shazia Mirza on Thursday — B L Soni/DNA

several times by anxious organisers what she would talk about in Mumbai, given her history of attracting controversy. But she insists she doesn't finesse her material according to the country. As it turns out, Mirza's punchlines were quite "safe" — bawdy sex and gay jokes, self-deprecating jibes about identity and puns on religion ("Pakistani International Airlines doesn't have emergency exits, it has prayer

points. And during prayers, everyone faces Mecca, including the pilot. Which probably explains the 12-hour delays"). Mirza, who has been labelled as a Muslim woman comedian in British and American publications, was probably less edgy than Mumbai would have liked. But then, she admits she doesn't use comedy to draw attention to issues. "I just want to make people laugh, and everybody can make what they will

Frown to smiles

Mirza, who has been routinely heckled in London and inundated with hate mail, spent an incident-less evening in Mumbai.

of that," she says, fashionably un-PC. Mirza was a former science teacher who strayed into stand-up some years ago because she hated her job and her students ("I tried to entertain them but they told me 'God, Miss, you're not even funny. Get a real job!'"). But it was her post-911 gigs, and much-quoted opening line — "Hi I'm Shazia Mirza. At least that's what it says on my pilot's licence" — that got her both laughs and international renown.

Yet Mirza's conservative parents, "good Asians that they are", hesitate to tell people what their daughter does. Mirza, who has the comic's gift of casting a funny eye over everything, says she picked up enough stuff for her next show from her upscale Mumbai hotel itself, within hours of being in the city. Clearly India is going to be an important part of her repertoire — Asian sense of humour or not.

