

Anwar Ditta – A struggle for family unity



image 1

Consider the photograph above.

In the photograph a young woman places her arms protectively across four children. Who is she? She stands in a crowd. She stands with her head held high. Her gesture of protection leaves us in no doubt that these are her children. The mother of these children has a presence that reaches beyond those of all the other people in the image. She stands looking out, almost defiant at those around her. The other people in the image seem to stand in protection of her. Even when we do not know the details of the event, as we read the image we can feel the momentous nature of the event to which we know the children are central. They stand in the centre of the image, they are protected by their mother and they each hold a bunch of flowers.

The picture depicts Anwar Ditta's reunion with three of her children after six years of separation due to the home office refusal to allow her children to Britain.

On either side of her stand women who do not look out with assurance as she does. They seem to look down, one appears to be biting her lip as though trying to not to show all that she feels. They are both part but also somehow separated from the event unfolding. Who are they and what are they feeling?

These two women are Jaswinder Kaur and Nasira Begum, two other women who were still campaigning in April 1981 for the right to live in Britain. Their joy at Anwar's reunion with her children must have been mixed with their anxiety and despair at their own situation.

Below is Anwar's story, the story of an ordinary mother forced to turn extraordinary for the basic human right to be with her children.

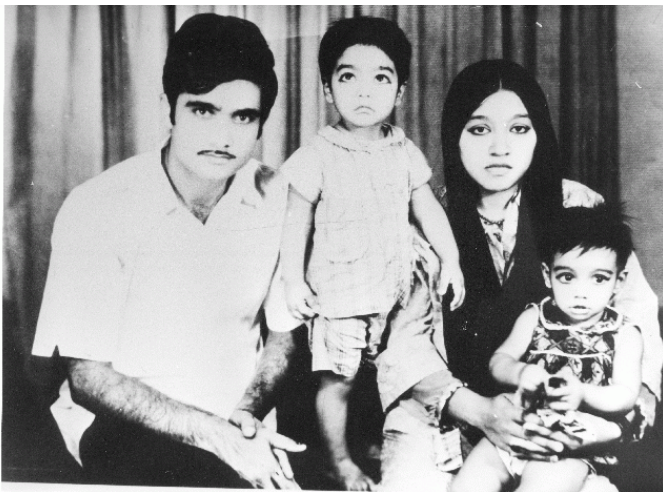


Anwar Ditta was born in Birmingham in 1953. In 1962 her parents separated. Her father was given custody of the children and she and her sister were sent to Pakistan. She was married in 1968 and had three children while living in Pakistan. In 1975 she and her husband decided to return to England. They left the three children in Pakistan while they found a house and work, intending to send for the children as soon as they were settled.

On returning to Britain, Anwar Ditta and her husband remarried believing that their Islamic marriage would not be recognised under English law. On applying for their children to join them in England in 1976, the home office declared that they did not believe that the children were hers because they were born before her marriage in England. They refused to believe that she had ever lived in Pakistan and added:

‘It appeared that there might be two Anwar Ditta’s, i.e. one who married Shuja-u-din in Pakistan in 1968 and the other who Shuja-u-din married in the United Kingdom in 1975’

Anwar was in despair, she had photographs of herself in Pakistan, with her husband and with her children, she had birth certificates for all her children and despite having asthma as a child in England and needing frequent medical attention, there were no medical records for her in Britain for 13 years until she re-registered in 1975. It proved that she was certainly overseas. Despite all of this, the home office would not accept her story.



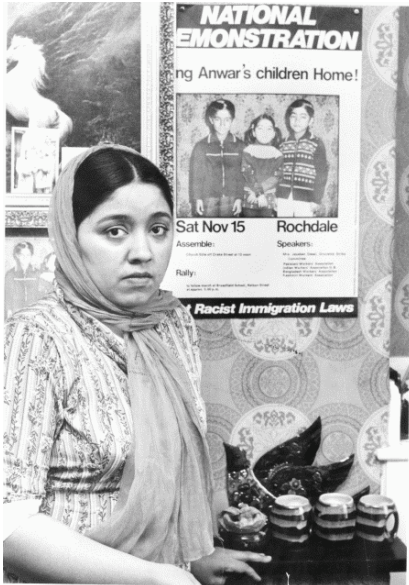
One of the photographs submitted as evidence of marriage and to prove that the children were hers. The photograph was taken in Jhelum, Pakistan, in 1973 just before the birth of her third child.

image 2

In December 1979 Anwar Ditta along with supportive friends and acquaintances started the Anwar Ditta Defence Campaign to bring her children home. She was supported by a wide variety of organisations including the Bradford and Manchester Asian Youth Movements, Indian Workers Association, Rochdale Trades Council, Rochdale Labour Party, National Union of Public Employees, Rochdale CRE, Rochdale Asian Women’s Movement and individuals such as the MP Joel Barnett and Vanessa Redgrave.



Tandana - the Glowworm



Anwar at home after a demonstration in Rochdale in support of her campaign 1980

image 3

Her life as a traditional British Pakistani housewife was to change forever. For the next 16 months Anwar stood up and learned to speak in front of hundreds and sometimes thousands of people to publicise her plight and raise support for her campaign to be united with her children. As the writer and campaigner Tariq Mehmood remarked. 'She was a prolific and powerful speaker. There are many grown men whom she reduced to tears'.



image 4

Anwar addressing a picket at Blackpool beach during the Labour Party conference there in 1980.

'When a person commits a crime, for example murder, they only need one or two witnesses to convict him. I've got more than ten or twenty witnesses who can prove they are my children, but the Home Office doesn't bother to ask them....Why am I going to these meetings? Why am I getting people to help me? Because they are my children. Do you think its easy to campaign? Do you think its easy to go out in all



weathers to petition? Do you think its easy doing all these things? Its really ridiculous making black people suffer and destroying their families. What kind of a law is this? God knows what hell we are going through.'

The words of Anwar Ditta printed in a campaign pamphlet in 1980.



Anwar walking with her daughter at the front of a demonstration in her home town of Rochdale. The collapse and subsequent death of an Indian Workers Association member on this demonstration was to have a deep impression on Anwar.

image 5



Anwar speaking at a meeting while she holds her daughter's hand. Samera was born in 1976 after her return to Britain. 'I used to take Samera with me everywhere' recalls Anwar.

image 6



The strength of the campaign along with the determination of Anwar Ditta herself eventually led to the production of a documentary by World in Action that was screened in March 1981. The documentary included the taking and analysis of blood tests from her children and Anwar to prove that the children were undoubtedly hers – an examination which she had always offered to undertake. The home office refusal was overturned the following day.

Anwar's children arrived in Britain in April 1981. She remembered the sacrifices and solidarity that others had given her by supporting other people in their struggle for justice in the years to follow.

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image 7 Anwar marching with Tony Benn and other trade unionists in protest against apartheid in South Africa, 1982



Activities for the Citizenship curriculum using this case study:

1. Which key elements of the European Convention on Human Rights and the 2001 UK Human Rights Act (date?) would help Anwar Ditta if she was fighting to bring her children over today?
2. You have studied a summary of the 1989 UN Convention on the rights of the child and made notes on it.
 - Now an Asian woman comes to you for advice. She has been told by the government that her children in Bangladesh cannot join her in Britain as they do not believe they hers. She has come to you for advice and for some hope. So you need to give her positive answers.
 - Prepare a detailed report on the advice you have given her for your files.
3. Consider how this case may be dealt with differently today as a result of changes in legislation and forms of evidence.
4. Study the media pack
 - Produce one report for your local paper before the news of Anwar Ditta's success
 - Now produce a report for the local paper after the news of Anwar Ditta's victory.

Write down the key differences between the two reports.

5. Photographic analysis exercise.

Before discussing the details of the case, use images 1,2 and 6 to consider what the photographs tell us about Anwar as a woman.

How do we think she feels in the images?

What do you think is happening in the images?

Can we put the photographs in a chronological order?

Following this exercise, consider the other images which have further clues about the story such as banners and posters. How much of Anwar's story can you piece together from the images.

What do the images tell us about the way Anwar has changed as a woman and as a citizen? What lessons can this give us about the importance and value of active citizenship?



Other Useful resources

1. Children and the Human Rights Act

Sandhya Drew

Save the Children , 2000 (ISBN 1 84187 037 4) £10.00

2. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Save the Children, 1997, £40.00

3. United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child

International Save the Children Alliance training kit

4. <http://www.therightssite.org.uk/html/kyr.htm>

easily digestible details about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

5. www.tandana.org

for information on other immigration campaigns and more resources about Anwar Ditta.

