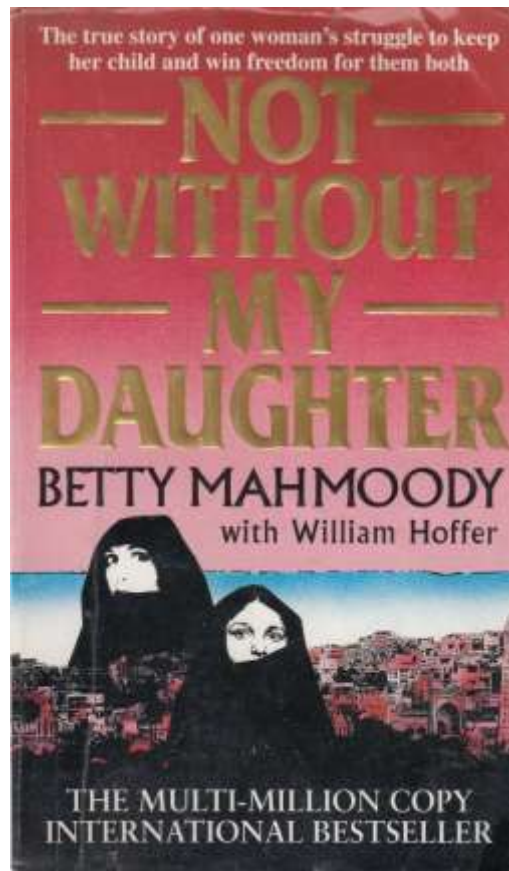


**Culture and Cultural Conflict in Betty Mahmoody's  
*Not without My Daughter***

**Dr. Gautami Pawar, M.A., Ph.D.**

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Courtesy: <https://www.bleakhousebooks.com.hk/pages/books/6559/william-hoffer-betty-mahmoody/not-without-my-daughter>

**Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to study culture and cultural conflict in Betty Mahmoody's *Not Without My Daughter* (1987) written along with William Hoffer. The novel is a memoir of Betty Mahmoody. Betty was born and groomed in the culture of America and married to Moody Mahmoody. She had to come reluctantly to Iran after few years of marriage. There she realized

the stark difference between the culture, traditions, beliefs, ideology, and customs of Iran and USA and she found it suffocating to live in the hellish circumstances. She is born and brought up in America where Liberty and Equality are the foundations of its constitution. Treatment to women in America and Iran is like day and night. The differences in this culture lead to conflict as her expectations of a certain behavior coming from her cultural background didn't meet, because Iranian culture had the different cultural background and different expectations. The paper examines the culture and cultural conflict in *Not Without My Daughter*.

**Keywords:** Culture, Cultural conflict, *Not Without My Daughter* and Betty Mahmoody

## **Introduction**

Betty Mahmoody is an American author and well-known speaker. She is known for her memoir, *Not Without My Daughter*, which is written along with William Hoffer. The second book on her credit is *For the Love of a Child* which is written along with lawyer Dun chock. The book deals with promoting legislation on behalf of families who have been forcibly separated. The book is about real stories of parents trying to locate young sons and daughters testify to the enormity of the problem. Betty Mahmoody is also holding the responsibilities as the President and co-founder of an organization One World: For Children that encourages understanding between cultures and strives to offer security and protection to children of bi-cultural marriages.

## ***Not without My Daughter* is a Real-Life Story**

*Not without My Daughter* is one of the famous books as it is a real-life story of Betty. The book is also translated in Marathi by Leena Sahani and translated in Gujrati by Aruna Jadeja. The movie is also screened on the book with the same name. The book opens with Betty's arrival in Iran with her four-year old daughter Mahatob and Husband Dr. Sayyad Mahmoody (Moody). Sayyad Mahmoody is an Iranian-American living in the United States. When the family arrives in Iran, Betty realizes that her husband plans to stay in Iran and has no intention of letting her or Mahtob return to the United States. The book depicts the culture of Iran and the state of Iran at that time. It also describes treatment to women, the hellish circumstances created by Moody and his family and the trauma and Betty's successful struggle for escape along with her daughter. The book was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize

## **Culture and Cultural Conflict in *Not Without My Daughter***

Culture is a set of beliefs and ideologies which human being practices in life. There is diversity in cultures; there are variances between beliefs, customs, and ideology of a culture. It is not easy to accept the alien culture which in contrast to one's culture and it leads to cultural conflict. Cultural plays a vital role in shaping one's personality.

The novel, *Not without My Daughter* is a real-life story of Betty Mahmoody. Betty is born and groomed in American culture. Liberty, Equality is the foundations of American culture. She married Dr. Moody Mahmoody who is from Iran but has settled in America. Once she had to go to Iran with her four-year daughter unwillingly. She was held captive in Iran. She compares the culture of Iran to America and finds the extreme differences in the culture of American and Iran.

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Dr. Gautami Pawar, M.A., Ph.D.

**Culture and Cultural Conflict in Betty Mahmoody's *Not without My Daughter***

312

The novel portrays the horrible experiences and hellish circumstances occurred with Betty. It also narrates the struggle to escape along with her daughter, Mahtob.

American culture has its own features; one of the main features is freedom of choice. They like personal space around them and make sure to respect others space. But in Iran, the picture is very different. Women's rights were severely restricted in Iran so even Married women can't even leave the country without their husband's permission.

### **Status of Women**

The novel also throws lights on how women are considered as the individuals. We can form an opinion through the incidents portrayed in the novel that women were the victims of the society. They were afraid of being abandoned by the family. They are denied their desires and rights to a self-respecting life of their choice and as an individual, they were of no significance. And it made them accept the cruelty of their husband with silence. They were prohibited to utter a word in protest. There were examples of working women, but they had to follow the rules. Once Betty and Moddy were invited at his cousin's place for dinner and she was asked there –

‘... Before you came you heard a lot of things about how women are oppressed in Iran. That you have been here a while you understand that it is not true. That those are all lies?’ (49)

They were expecting that Betty would give a positive answer to please them but she firmly said –

‘That's not what I see at all’. (49)

She had observed how Iranian women were slaves to their husbands, how their religion, as well as government, concerned them at every turn, the practice exemplified by their haughty instances.

### **The Compulsion of Dress Code**

There were restrictions on the dressing, in Iran dress code is mandatory and not following the dress code that is chador will be arrested.

Women in Iran required keeping their arms, legs, and forehead covered (14)

What are they going to do to me if I don't wear it? I wondered.

Arrest me?

I posted the question to moody and he replied simply ‘Yes’ (21)

Betty has experienced the restriction herself. One of the duty or assignment of Pasdar was to make sure whether women were properly dressed. Assignment was to make sure women she was actually addressed by the Pasdar (a patrol group that monitors women's attire) three times while in Tehran.

The first time she was pulled aside was because her rosary (large head scarf) was not covering the hair on her forehead. Her second infraction was because her socks were wrinkled and her third was because her sock was falling down, which uncovered a small portion of her knee from under her coat. Women are suppressed and not allowed to arouse voice because it is unveiled. Even in schools and on airport she had seen not only women but school going girls had to cover themselves.

### **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is against the law in America and it is also illegal to hit anyone -wife, child, parent or even a pet. Such type of behavior is not tolerated. However, there are some incidents where Moody had hit Betty and the daughter. But no one came forward to save her from his torture. Moody and his family created hellish circumstances to torture Betty not only physically but also mentally, psychologically. There are so many incidences of violence depicted in the novel. But no one had raised voice against it. Once moody beat Betty, but no one-stop Moody as he was the elder in the family. And it seems domestic violence is a common thing in the family.

‘we cannot go against Dahijon, ’Nasrsrine repeated, ‘but it is okay. All men are like this.’  
‘Mammal does the same thing to me. Reza does the same thing to Essay. All men are like this.’  
(pages 132,133)

Even in public, any injury or violence toward Betty and Mahtob was endorsed. The law of Iranian granted Moody absolute authority over his wife and daughter.

### **Hygiene**

Americans used to take shower twice a day they are very careful about not bothering anyone else with their body odor or bad breath they give importance to cleanliness. But Ameh Bozorg Moody’s sister took objection and advised not to waste water and gave a childish explanation that

‘You wash all your cell off of your skin and you will get cold in your stomach and be sick’. (40).

She had even observed bugs in rice and unhygienic methods of cooking. Many times, she slept empty stomach at night. She had described the filthy conditions of washrooms at the airport, at Ameh Bozorg’s house and school.

### **Marriages in Iran**

In Iran, many of the couples were cousins married to cousins and it results in the deformities and deficiencies in children. Betty had seen many genetic abnormalities in Iran.

If you are not Iranian and marry an Iranian man, you automatically become an Iranian citizen. If the marriage occurs in Iran, your national passport will be taken from you. If you divorce or your husband dies, you can reject your citizenship but your children by default will be Iranian citizenship.

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Dr. Gautami Pawar, M.A., Ph.D.

**Culture and Cultural Conflict in Betty Mahmoody’s *Not without My Daughter***

314

### **Sections of Islamic Guidance Book**

The sections of Islamic Guidance Book stunned Betty. As per the section regarding money and property, husband owned including children, the wife owned nothing. Women don't have the voice. In case of divorce, children had to live with father. Children's comfort was not considered. Even after the death of a man, the guardianship of the children is denied to his widow, but custody of the child is given to the close relative of the man. To prevent conceptions against husband's wish was a capital offense. Betty is aware of it but when she understood the seriousness of the fact she had to remove the 'T from her body in a very painful way as she dreaded that using it is an offense.

### **Views about baby boy Importance of Baby Boy**

It is observed that generally men married with women to the security property as she has to give a baby (male) as an inheritance to the property. Women treated as a property or a source who will provide the heir and it must be a boy. And it is a duty of a wife to give Son to the family otherwise she is a Bad wife Moody also expected a baby boy from Betty and he also told her about it.

'You are such a bad wife you do not give me any more children I am going to get other wives so that I can have a son'. (288)

An obligation to accept the religion - In Iran, the wife should adopt the religion of her husband and it is obligatory. If a lady from other country married to an Iranian by default she became Islamic. She was not allowed to choose the religion. When Betty and Mahtob traveled to the Swiss Embassy and talked to Helen, Helen informed them that, since Betty's husband was an Iranian, Iran's laws dictated that she too had become an Iranian citizen.

### **Prejudice about American**

Illustrated in the novel, in the school students are told to say Maagbarrg America! (146) Betty has bitter experiences being American. She had to listen to different comments of people to her. Americans may not openly make any negative remark about some one's religion, family background, but in contrast in Iran Betty hears negative remarks about her country. And what Betty realizes is that people of Iran have negative interpretations about America.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, Betty had experienced the stark difference between the culture of Americans and Iran and she was distressed and underwent a trauma. The cultural conflicts forced her to rebel, but the circumstances and the forces become the barrier and made her to struggle to escape. It was very painful for her. This paper concludes that Culture helps to shape one's character and form ideologies. When Moddy was in America he never forced Betty to do certain things but during his stay in Iran, he interfered in Betty's space. It is very challenging to accept an alien culture which is having stark differences with one's own culture. One should respect other's culture. One should respect others as individuals and give space. Suppression leads to rebellious attitude. Betty is suppressed, and it is one of the reasons for her struggle to escape.

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315



Dr. Gautami Pawar  
Associate Professor and Head  
Department of English  
Abasaheb Garware College  
Pune- 411004  
Maharashtra  
India  
[gautamipawar24@yahoo.co.in](mailto:gautamipawar24@yahoo.co.in)

Betty Mahmoody agrees to visit Iran with her husband, Moody, and daughter, Mahtob, despite Fierce, Frightening, and Real. This was a 500+ book that I finished within the span of two days.. This autobiography will make your soul weep. It is a MUST-READ. This story completely took my breath away.Â I will never forget this autobiography. Betty Mahmoody showed an astounding level of courage in the face of adversity. I can't imagine being in her shoes. She was truly an example of a "Mama bear."Â My husband agreed that for the most part, it did represent the culture accurately. (Except for the uncleanliness part - my husband's family are all very clean, almost afraid of germs.) With this book you have to keep in mind the time in which it takes place.