



A MOTHERIST EVALUATION OF BINWELL SINYANGWE'S, A COWRIE OF HOPE

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Abstract:

Single parenting can be challenging particularly for widows in Africa. These challenges can produce some effects on the single-parent family. Studies that have examined the challenges of single parenting posit that it has negative effects. However, there is the need to reevaluate the phenomenon to determine whether it has any form of positive effects in addition to its negative effects and highlight the coping strategies employed by the single mother as well as her daughter. The study interrogates Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* using a motherist approach. The study employed an in-depth textual analysis to hinge the effects and coping strategies of the single-parent family. Further, the widowed-single parent encounters economic hardship and emotional distress but her experiences motivate her to be hardworking. The study concludes that single parenting, though not the best, can however have some positive effects depending on how individuals react to the situation. The negative attitude of the society towards a widow, can have adverse effects on the widow and her children. Family members of a deceased should therefore treat widows well so that their children can acquire bright futures.

Keywords: motherism, social nurturer, endurance, self-sacrificing love, cooperation of sexes

1. Introduction

Bressler (1994) defines feminism as a "collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society." The term tends to be used for the women's rights movement, which began in the late 18th century and continues to campaign for complete political, social, and economic equality between women and men. Feminism generally identifies specific gender issues and recognizes women's position internationally as one of second-class status and 'otherness' and seeks to correct it.

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Bressler asserts that men either consciously or unconsciously have oppressed women, allowing them little or no voice in the political, social and economic issues of their society. By not giving voice and value to women's opinions, responses and writings, men have suppressed the female, defined what it means to be feminine and thereby devoiced, devalued and trivialized what it means to be a woman. In effect, men have made women the "nonsignificant other". Bressler further states that the goal of feminism is to change this degrading view of women so that all women will realize that they are not a "nonsignificant other," but that instead each woman is a valuable person possessing the same privileges and rights as every man. The main aim of feminism, therefore, is the empowerment of women.

In Africa, feminism became very prominent in the 1980s when African women realized that their rights were being violated. African feminism involves an effort by African women to be fully involved, as equal partners, in both the struggle for the freedom and fulfilment of African people in the face of racism, colonialism and oppression and the worldwide struggle by women against social, cultural, and political marginalization. One of the areas of this double-sided struggle has been the effort on the part of women authors and more recently, a number of feminist critics and literary theorists, to place on the centre stage of African literary history a new canon of writings by African women, along with the visions of history, of human identity, and of literary aesthetics that those writings represent. (Killam & Rowe, 2000). Mariama Ba portrays this situation in her book *So Long a Letter* (1980).

Feminism emanated to take care of the welfare of women in society. Steady (1981) states:

"A genuine African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European/American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to men but challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples. Thus, it aims at highlighting the inequities in the male- female relationship in the society, with a view to changing institutionalized subjugation, intimidation and oppression of women. African feminism or more precisely a feminist approach to literature, provides the opportunity of re-evaluating attitudes and misconceptions about women, which have been buttressed all along both by African culture and the misogynous traditions of the European colonial masters."

Motherhood in Africa is a powerful institution, central to the experiences of women. In order to express womanhood to the full, every woman is encouraged to marry and procreate so that through her, the lineage is continued (Ezinwanyi, 2012; Ngcobo, 2012). This shows that high premium is placed on children, hence the importance of the role of mothers in the African context. The African traditional view of womanhood configures the social construction of African woman and the role -participant carved for her in her society. The African woman is therefore denoted by marriage and maternity (Olayiwola and Olowonmi, 2013). Adebayo (178) reiterates that in the African culture, a woman's moment of fulfilment is childbirth. *"The myth of the omnipresent nurturing mother is everywhere because of the reproductive service a woman performs in the society."* The implication is that, to attain full womanhood in Africa one must be a mother.

However, the struggles of the African woman are enormous due to stereotypical roles carved for her as a woman. Mikell (1997) as cited in Jacobs (2011) posits that women have often

suffered disproportionately in African crises. African women have lower educational levels and continue to engage in agricultural and other lower income producing rural activities. All these activities women engage in, are geared towards the upkeep of the family. Jacob's assertion however does not hold completely in modern Africa. Some African women have rejuvenated themselves through education and are at par with their male counterparts in the labour market. Lower income producing activities are now left in the hands of the few women who unfortunately were not able to acquire formal education.

In effect, Adebayo (2015) asserts that, "*in fictional works written since 1950's, motherhood has been the one singular role in which the woman has been placed on a pedestal even though she largely remained within the home, in the fields or in the market place where she labored to improve the material condition of the family.*" Women work to ensure the survival of their families. Their situation becomes stressful when they are sole parents. Particularly, widowed- single parents go through emotional, financial, psychological challenges and sometimes harsh treatments from the family members of their deceased spouses. Women have to adapt to the changes in their lives after the death of their spouses, so that they can function well in the nurturing of their children.

This study examines a single mother's perseverance in mothering her child in Binwell Sinyangwe's, *A Cowrie of Hope* (ACH). It examines the representation of a widowed single mother in her struggle against all odds to cope with the challenges of her society. It employs an in-depth textual analysis and motherism theory to explicate the struggles and survival of Sinyangwe's protagonist. It sets out to interrogate the cause of her single parenthood, her challenges and the coping strategies she adopts to ensure the success of her daughter.

2. Theoretical Framework

The fear of imitating the Whites has led to African indigenous variants of feminism. Some of these variants suggested, include African Womanism by C. O. Ogunyemi, Motherism by C. O. Acholonlu and Stiwanism by Omolara Ogundipe -Leslie. Recently, Obioma Nnaemeka proposed negofeminism and Akachi Ezeigbo proposed Snail Sense Feminism (Sotunsa, 2012). This work adopts Motherism, an African alternative to western feminism, as a theory to assess the role performed by a single mother to achieve success for her daughter.

In her book *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* (1995), Catherine Obianuju Acholonu postulates the concept of *Motherism* as an African alternative to Western feminism. It focuses on the centrality of motherhood in the African female experience. The concept Motherism, according to Acholonu (1995) is:

"An Afrocentric feminist theory, therefore, must be anchored on the matrix of motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis of survival and unity of the black race through ages. Whatever Africa's role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from her quintessential position as the Mother Continent of humanity, nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African Art, African Literature, (especially women's writing)... . Africa's alternative to western feminism is MOTHERISM and Motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture."

The above quote shows that motherhood is central to the African female experience. She proposes the centrality of the mother to the African epistemology since Africa herself is the mother continent (Adebayo, 2015). Motherhood is an upheld phenomenon in Africa because mothers play a vital role of transmitting culture to the younger generation. This mothering role is special to Acholonu which prompts her do a theory on motherism. Godono (2005) explains in his study titled, "Postcolonial Motherism: A Brand New Woman in the African Novel" that, the idea of woman (mother) theorized by Acholonu emphasizes that African women are "*the spiritual base of every family, community and nation.*" She lists the weapons of motherism as love, tolerance, service and cooperation of the sexes. Sotunsa (2012) also adds that, in African literature, "*the image of the mother is often idealized as an epitome of self-sacrificing love, endurance, nurturer, provider of warmth among other virtues.*" These characteristics are the embodiment of a mother.

Some critics however have debunked the myth of motherhood as the ultimate fulfilling role for the African woman. They therefore present bitter experiences that often characterize motherhood. Sotunsa (2008) gives example of such writers as Emecheta and Flora Nwapa in their works, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *One is Enough* respectively. These works make it uneasy to give "motherhood" the full dignity. However, in the text under study, motherhood is dignified. The theory is appropriate for this study because the single mother in *A Cowrie of Hope* is an embodiment of the virtues mentioned.

Acholonu (1995) clearly explains that a motherist could be a man or a woman. Motherism has no sex barrier since motherism has partnership, cooperation, tolerance, love, understanding and patience as its core. This therefore means that for effective *motherism*, there must be a male-female complementarity that ensures the wholeness of human existence in a balanced ecosystem.

3. Synopsis of *A Cowrie of Hope*

A Cowrie of Hope tells the story of a poor widow and her daughter in rural Zambia. The story reveals the economic hardship in Zambia in the 1990's. Amidst the hardship, the protagonist, Nasula, seeks a better life for her daughter, Sula. She believes that education is the key to a woman's freedom. She wants to give her daughter a better formal education so that she can escape the struggles that women in Zambia go through in order to survive.

Nasula decides to travel to her in-laws who had rejected her when her husband dies. She goes with the intention to solicit for funds so that she can beat the deadline for her daughter's school enrolment. After a day's walk, she gets to the village to witness the devastating state of her in-laws. She meets them in abject poverty while her husband's younger brother is also at a point of death. She returns empty-handed but she does not give up. Nasula does all she can as a mother to ensure her child's success.

When all hope is lost, a friend, Nalukwi, arrives in the village and advises her to come with her to Lusaka and sell her last sack of highly sought-after Mbala beans. She embarks on the journey with her friend but falls prey into the hands of a dupe who offers her the highest price but manages to bolt with the sack of beans without making the required payment. Upon realization that she is duped, she makes all efforts to look for the man. He finally spots him after a week and struggles with the man, Gode Silavwe. He is saved by the timely intervention of a young police officer but when they are both sent to the police station, the senior police officers

collaborate with the thief and make her case pointless. The police officers accept bribe from the thief and relieve him.

Nasula is determined to get to the bottom of the matter. She manages to talk to the head of Lusaka police station, Mr. Samson Luhila, who assists her for justice to prevail. Gode Silavwe is arrested and made to pay an amount higher than she expected. She travels back with the joy and assurance of the fulfilment of her dream, Sula going to the secondary school.

4. Motherism in *A Cowrie of Hope*

In *A Cowrie of Hope*, Nasula, the protagonist, is a widow. She was married to Winelo but their marriage was not a happy one. Her marriage is described as a whirlwind. It is stated that Nasula's parents died when she was young. It is therefore an acquaintance in the village who marries her off hurriedly to Winelo. She suffers humiliation in her marriage, but she manages to stay with her husband. Unfortunately, Nasula's husband is shot in a theft case but before his death, he makes provision for his wife and daughter. As a widow, she is prone to societal abuse. Her husband leaves them some money and goods but just as it happens in some African traditions, her in-laws deprive her of all the possessions. She is accused of the killing her husband and thrown out of the house after she refuses to marry Isaki, the younger brother of her late husband. She together with her daughter is left to wallow in poverty and suffering. This section elucidates the roles and virtues of a mother and how they are exemplified in the protagonists, Nasula.

4.1 Mother as a Social Nurturer

Motherism is a maternal form of feminism that sees rural women as performing the necessary task of nurturing society (Nkeelah, 2016). A nurturer is one who feeds or supports; educates or trains (educalingo.com). A social nurturer is warm hearted and usually puts the needs of others above his or her own needs. Some mothers are bent on satisfying the needs of their children in order for them to fit in the society. One of such women is Sinyangwe's protagonist, Nasula. Alkali et al., (2013) affirm that the traditional role of the African woman has essentially been that of a matriarch and a social nurturer. Nasula displays her role perfectly as an African traditional woman.

Nasula is a poor illiterate widow burdened with the responsibility of educating her only daughter Sula. She is worried about her child's education since there seem to be no hope of getting an amount of one hundred thousand *kwacha* needed to pay for the requirements into a secondary school. Her daughter has completed grade nine and has passed to enter grade 10 in a boarding secondary school. But Nasula is described as poverty, as seen in the following lines:

"Nasula was poverty, she was loneliness and aloneness. Suffering was her life. She wore it like her own skin. A young peasant woman in her early thirties, beautiful and gracefully built, Nasula had no means and no dependable support. She was the god's plant growing on poor soils without tendrils. Both her parents had died not long after she had come of age and had left her with nothing. but herself. Her late husband had left her some money and goods. But hardly before his funeral was over, her in-laws had swooped everything out of her possession and left her to languish

with nothing in her hands, alone with her only daughter and child. She had lived like that to this day, poor, parentless, widowed and without a relative to talk to and to whom she could turn." (ACH 4 -5)

The narrator has given a vivid description of Nasula's situation. From the above description, one could think that such a person would give up on life, but this single mother is determined to persevere in spite of her condition. Though an illiterate, she perceives education as a tool of liberation for a woman. She therefore wants her daughter to achieve much. The welfare of her daughter is her utmost concern "She wanted her daughter to reach mountain peaks with her schooling and from there carve a decent living that would make it possible for her not to depend on a man for her existence (ACH 5). Due to her own experience with her husband and as an illiterate woman, she strives to free her daughter from depending on men. "Emancipation, freedom and independence from men" p. 5. Her source of motivation is when she attends a sensitization meeting on how to read and write, and the women's rights organized by educated women. She learns that education can free one from patriarchy and poverty. The narrator says:

"She had not forgotten and she would not forget. How could she? The faces and voices of those young women of good education and good jobs in offices who came to Kalingalinga shanty compound, where she lived with Winelo to talk to the women of the compound about the freedom of the woman. What they said about the importance of knowing how to read and write and of having a good education, what they said about the rights of a woman, and the need for a woman to stand on her own." (ACH 8)

Listening to the women, gives her hope, light and freedom for her daughter. Her determination to nurture her daughter is seen in the various efforts that she makes to get the needed amount for her schooling. She travels on foot from Swelini to Mangano through a wild forest during the night. Her courage is exhibited in the lines below:

"The woman walked. She walked and walked along a meandering footpath. Grains of sand in size and colour brought to her mind the sight and smell of roasted finger millet. The forest on both sides was dense, full of virginity, and a still silence as uncanny as that of the land of the dead. In that ghostly womb of untampered nature, the woman walked the distance to Mangano. Alone, unescorted by man. Nasula was courage. Days had inured her to many things and turned her into a hard wood." (ACH 14)

Nasula's courage stems from the fact that she is determined to achieve her aim of seeing Isaki for money to pay for her daughter's schooling. The purpose of her journey encourages her to put all fears behind her and to push forward. Unfortunately, her journey turns out to be fruitless, since he meets Isaki in a devastated condition, he is on the verge of dying. Her in-laws are also in abject poverty.

A mother as a good nurturer does not usually give up on what she is determined to do for her daughter. There is therefore evidence that in order to gather the amount, she tends her

field. She borrows fertilizer from Pupila, one of the villagers, with the intention of repayment. She plants all her seeds and applies the fertilizer to the seeds expecting good yield. Unfortunately, there is not enough rain for a good harvest. She further works for people who disappoint her at the time of payment. She again makes efforts to borrow money which she could work for or pay back during the next harvest season, but people are not ready to lend to a poor woman. Nasula does not relent on her efforts as a good mother. She tries to farm again. This is seen in the lines:

"In November, she cried to Pupila again. The man gave her two pockets of fertilizer and a half pocket of seed maize, and again she toiled and planted the half pocket of seed maize. But this being May, just over five months after she had sowed the seed, which was a late maturing seed, the crop was not yet ready for harvesting, and even if it had been, Pupila would not have allowed her to sell any of it before he collected his share first, especially because the rain and the crop were again not good and no one could tell how much was to be harvested from her field."
(ACH 40)

All her efforts are geared towards getting money to give her daughter the needed training through schooling.

4.2 Endurance

Nasula is portrayed as a mother who endures hardship for the sake of her daughter. She has nobody to assist her in her child's education, but she is determined to fight with the last straw of her blood. When all hope seemed lost, Nasula's childhood friend, Nalukwi suggests to her to sell her last sack of beans in Lusaka for one hundred and twenty thousand *kwacha* which can pay Sula's fees. Her friend suggests:

"Beans are very expensive in Lusaka at this time of the year, there are very few kinds available, especially the type that you grow here in Mbala, the yellow and white beans. Even if you have just one bag, it will give you the one hundred thousand kwacha that you need to send the child to school." (ACH 53)

Her friend's suggestions reveal how women can cooperate with each other in mothering. It is said that, *"two heads are better than one."* Had her friend not arrived at her place, she would not have known that the solution to her problem is right with her in her house. Nasula is resuscitated with the assurance and hope from her friend. But her dreams are again shattered when she is duped by a thief who offers a higher price but manages to go away with the sack of beans without paying the agreed amount. The man puts the sack of beans in his yellow car and asks Nasula to follow him to buy more of such beans. He even brings out a bunch of money which makes Nasula's heart pound, but he does not pay her immediately. The narrator says:

"Reaching the spot where Nasula had been selling the beans, he told her to wait a bit longer. 'Let me see if I can find more beans like yours,' he said walking northwards towards another part of the market. Nasula waited and waited and the man did not come. She became

impatient and decided to follow him. She followed the passage along which he had walked, there was no sign of him. She walked down every passage where produce was sold in bulk, searching for him, but in vain. She decided to go and wait for him by his car. The yellow car had gone.” (ACH 84)

Nasula's situation now seems desperate. Her only cowrie of hope is lost, and everything now seems hopeless. It seems she can no longer endure this pain and suffering. She begins to question herself. *“Suffering woman, what have you done to deserve this misfortune? What trouble have you caused against the gods? What have you spat on the shrine of your ancestors? A soul cannot be condemned to misfortune forever. this is too much.”* (ACH 85). Nasula's calamity is burdensome. She now questions her lot. She has no money even for her transportation back to the village. With the help of her friend Nalukwi, a man fortunately assists her with money for transportation back to her place. She endures all these suffering to ensure a better future for her daughter.

4.3 Self-sacrificing love

Nasula would like to sacrifice her life for her daughter. After she had been seen off to go back to her village, she decides half way through the journey to return to Lusaka in search of the thief. She cannot imagine herself going back empty-handed. She arrives in Lusaka and spends days and nights in the market looking for Gode Silavwe. All these while she does not bath, so she now looks dirty like a madwoman. Nasula goes through these experiences because of her love for her daughter. She reassures herself that she would find him. A power encourages her to forge ahead.

Nasula finally finds Gode Silavwe a week after. She gathers all her strength to confront him irrespective of the consequences. She attacks the man and insists that he pays her the money or give her back the sack of beans. Gode Silavwe feigns ignorance and claims that Nasula is a mad woman. In his attempt to leave, Nasula exclaims:

“‘You will not go anywhere until you give me my bag of beans or the money for it.’ Then gripped by a sudden fit of madness, she stepped forward and threw herself at the man, grabbing both lapels of his jacket in her hands and burying her head in his belly and perfume. ‘Give me my bag of beans or the money for it! Or you will have to kill me here and now!’” (ACH 126)

Nasula fights for what rightly belongs to her. She is ready to face the consequence even if it means losing her life. Gode fights back the poor woman. *“He pushed against her chest with the fingers touching the lower part of her neck in a warm, moistened curve. Pushing her backwards with heavy, violent force, she felt herself fly and crash to the ground with a dull thud”* (ACH 126). For the love of a daughter, a mother is ready to sacrifice her life.

4.4 Cooperation of the sexes

Mothering as a theory believes in the complementarity role of male and female. Nasula, in spite of all her efforts needed the help of men to achieve her dream. It is a policeman on duty who saves her in the course of her struggle with Silavwe. Both are sent to senior officers of Lusaka police station but the corrupt inspector releases Gode. The inspector claims that Nasula has no evidence to support her claim that Gode took her bag of beans. The police see Gode off and he

gives the police officer money and drives off. It is unfortunate that, the police who are supposed to ensure justice are portrayed as indulging in corrupt practices just like the policemen in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*.

Nasula does not relent on her efforts. She manages to see the head of the police station. This is another man whose intervention brings a turning point in Nasula's life. The officer Samson Luhila listens to Nasula's story and ensures that justice prevails. Gode is arrested and made to pay one hundred and fifty thousand *kwacha* to Nasula. Nasula is overwhelmed by the turn of events. Luhila makes her count the money to ensure that it is up to the amount. Her actions are described by the narrator in the lines below:

"Nasula left the chair she had been sitting on and knelt down with both her knees planted on the floor, and she lined the ten thousand kwacha notes Gode Silawwe had lined on the floor and counted them. The notes were fifteen. 'How much has it come to? Samson Luhila asked her when she had finished counting. 'One fifty.'" (ACH 144)

Nasula's efforts would have been in vain if these men had not supported her. This proves that, there must be cooperation between the sexes in order to accomplish best results.

4.5 Effects of single parenting in *A Cowrie of Hope*

Single parenting is beset with some challenging effects on both the parent and the children. Chiemelie (2011) as cited in Ekpenyong and Udisi (2016) confirms that *"the effects of single parenting are far reaching because it does not only affect the parents, it also affects the children."* If single parenting is as a result of the death of a spouse, then it becomes a big challenge. In instances where the surviving spouse is a woman, the attitude of society compounds her suffering. The absence of a man, who is believed to be a source of security and a provider for his family, creates a vacuum. Widowhood becomes a torture for women.

One effect of single parenting on Nasula is economic hardship. It is the responsibility of both parents to take care of children. In instances where the full responsibility of child upkeep is left in the hands of single parents, it is likely to bring about economic hardship. The single mother in *A Cowrie of Hope* is metaphorically described as poverty. She experiences poverty from childhood to adulthood. In her husband's house, she depended solely on her husband. While in her matrimonial home, the narrator records that Nasula's husband is the sole provider. There are gossips around her who say: *"Without Winelo, where or what would she be? He keeps her, he feeds her, he buys her clothes"* (ACH 6). This means that Nasula has nothing of her own. On an occasion when Nasula decides to go back to her village because of her husband's ill-treatment, she did not have money for transportation and because her husband refused to give her any, she had to unpack and stay back in her suffering. Such a woman now widowed, and deprived of her possessions, faces great economic challenge. This explains why she has to struggle over a year in order to get one hundred thousand *kwacha* to pay for her daughter's secondary education. If her husband were to be alive, he could easily have provided the needed amount for Sula's education. In the absence of her husband she faces financial challenges.

Single parents, particularly widows, suffer emotional distress especially when they are rejected by their in-laws and dispossessed of their possessions. Before the death of Nasula's

husband, he wrote that his house in Kalingalinga and the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand *kwacha* should be given to his wife especially for the sake of her daughter. Nasula's in-laws reject the contents of the will of the deceased. They deprive her of all the properties her husband left her with. The narrator says:

"What was the use? Was the man who was given to read the words the deceased had written even allowed to finish reading? How they frowned upon everything and tore the paper on which the words were written to pieces. How they took away everything from her except what was on her body. How they threw her out of the house and sold it, leaving her to spend nights at the bus station with the child before she found money for her travel and returned to the village." (ACH 9-10)

The family wants the property of the deceased to remain with them, they therefore suggest that Nasula marries Isaki, the younger brother of her late husband. Her refusal makes them chase Nasula and her daughter out of their home making them sleep on the streets for nights until they get money to go back to their village. This psychological trauma that Nasula goes through makes her emotionally imbalanced. When she thinks of the painful situation she goes through after her husband's death, she is not able to easily forget about it.

Consequently, Nasula suffers from insomnia. She is not able to sleep because she is always thinking of how to make her child succeed in life without depending on a man. She is desperate and has no one to turn to. The narrator portrays her emotional distress in the following lines:

"The woman was troubled. It was midnight, everybody in the village would be fast asleep, yet sleep would not come for her. Wide awake, her dark eyes open and dry, she stared vacantly at the fire. So, it was with her these days. After a hard day of endless pursuit, of searching for a solution to her problem, midnight would find her awake, thinking and worrying, asking herself the question: What shall I do? When desperation gave way to fear, the fear of her daughter's schooling coming to an end, her thoughts would stiffen and she would silently lament: Is this the way things end." (ACH 3- 4)

When she reminisces all the ordeals she has to go through after the death of her husband she becomes emotionally disturbed, but she encourages herself to throw everything behind her and forge ahead.

It could however be said that her sole responsibility of taking care of Sula makes her hardworking. Initially when Nasula is in her matrimonial home, her husband is the one who does everything for her, so she did not think of revitalizing herself as a woman to do something for herself. She learns a lesson from her experience. Her experience has taught her not to depend solely on man for a living. This is one reason why she is struggling to educate her child so that she does not also fall victim.

Sula, the daughter is not exempted from the effects of single parenting. She is made an object of scorn as a result of her mother's poverty. Her school bag, clothing and food she sends to school exposed her as a poor person. A description by the narrator makes her situation glaring:

"Sula's school bag, for example, was a gaudy affair made of old, different coloured materials which Nasula had sewn together in desperation and it was the source of much laughter and scorn. But Sula still carried the bag with amazing confidence and pride- and in patch-ridden, threadbare clothes without shoes on her feet." (ACH 73-74)

Her colleagues teased her, but she did not react negatively. She ignored them and concentrated on her studies. It is assumed that a child in this situation may be discouraged but Sula is not. She does not give up but continues steadfastly in her aim of achieving a good future for herself through her mother's encouragement.

Her background rather makes her determined to learn to the admiration of many people. She is one of the best students in her school and in her final exam, her result is the best, thus qualifying her for secondary school. Sula's academic achievement proves that children in single-family households are not always affected academically. They can stand against all odds and make it in life. A mother's love and concern in single-family households can also help in making such a difference.

5. Coping Strategies of the Single -parent Family

To survive as a widowed- single parent, one needs hard work and sacrifice. These are exemplified in Nasula. Sula, her daughter, also lives a frugal and undemanding life.

5.1 Hard work

Nasula works hard to survive in her hardship. She tills her own land and also works in other people's fields. She is also involved in cutting thatching grass for food, money or clothes. The narrator says: *"Her livelihood had therefore mainly depended on piece work"* (ACH 51). She does all these activities concurrently so that as a good mother she can provide for her daughter, the basic necessities of life. Nasula is determined to survive as a single parent amid the hardship of her time. The narrator explains in the following lines that there was economic hardship at that time:

"But during the nineties, especially of late, things had changed for the worse. The drought and the non-availability of fertilizers had complicated the livelihoods of many households. There was no money or produce to spare, and as a result piece work had become very difficult to find; and unrewarding if and when you found it. Life was now a long hard struggle for survival." (ACH 51)

This meant that everybody had to struggle for survival. In spite of the hard times in which they lived, Nasula is able to work and get a little money to sustain the family. She also exchanges her harvested beans for cassava when the need arises.

5.2 Frugal living

Sula, her daughter, shows a spirit of contentment and this helps her to adjust to her situation. She lives within her means and she is not bothered about what other children say about her especially, her uniform, school bag and food. She keeps her mother's words in mind and keeps

pressing on. She remembers her mother's advice that she should be worried only about her lessons. She therefore keeps all other things behind her. She reminds her mum: *"You told me that I should only worry about my lessons and nothing else; that I should think of where I come from, and remember that we are poor people with no one to turn to. So, I just look at them and try to learn"* (ACH 76). Sula's source of inspiration is her mother, so she readily adheres to her advice which keeps her going.

5.3 Undemanding Attitude

Another strategy that Sula adopts is that she does not demand things from her mother neither does she complain of all the ordeals she goes through in school. It is other people who rather inform her mother about what she goes through in school. Before Sula starts schooling, her mother is worried about stories she hears of other children and their nagging demands, but her daughter is different. She is not a demanding daughter. She does not even demand the things that her teachers ask them to bring to school. Her attitude is described as follows:

"Unlike other children in Swelini and the surrounding villages, Sula, from the first day, never complained about what she wore or took to school. She had never demanded anything. When something was needed at school and the teachers told the pupils to ask their parents for it, Sula would not do so. Only sometimes would she inform her mother that such a thing was needed at school. She always deliberately avoided saying that the teachers had told the pupils that their parents must provide them with the item. Nor had she ever threatened not to go to school or stop schooling if such or such happened or didn't happen." (ACH 73)

Sula knows that her mother cannot afford all the things that are being demanded so she does not want to disturb her.

5.4 Acceptance

Sula is not worried about her predicament. She accepts her situation by encouraging her mother not to worry too much about her secondary education if the means is not available. When her mother returns from her in-laws, Sula recognizes from her mother's behaviour that she was unsuccessful. She keeps mute about the issue without questioning her mother about the outcome of her journey. When her mother gathers courage to inform Sula about the devastating condition of her in-laws and the futile outcome of her journey, Sula says to her mother: *"Don't worry, it's all right, ... I will not be the first or last person to stop schooling because of lack of money"* (ACH 36-37). She sympathizes with her mother on her toils and efforts made over a year to get money for her schooling. She accepts her fate, and her mother keeps encouraging her. Her mother attributes her suffering to the fact that her parents did not send her to school. She therefore promises her daughter her full support for her schooling.

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that, the challenges of single parenting can be managed well to the advantage of the sufferers.

6. Conclusion

The study has examined Sinyangwe's widowed-single parent in *A Cowrie of Hope*. It identified that the protagonist performed her mothering role well. In spite of all the challenges and failures, she takes courageous measures to ensure that her daughter is successful in life. She envisages education as the only means by which a woman can become independent. She therefore struggles against all odds to get the needed amount for her child's secondary education.

It is evident from the motherist appraisal that Nasula, the protagonist of *A Cowrie of Hope*, possesses the virtues of motherhood. She is an embodiment of nurture, endurance and self-sacrificing love. She goes through hardship to nurture her daughter; she endures pain and suffering and she is ready to sacrifice her life for the sake of her daughter. Cooperation of the sexes is also established as a tenet of motherism. The complementarity role of male and female promotes success. Nasula is assisted by a junior police man and the head of Lusika police station before she is able to obtain justice.

Single parenting can have both negative and positive effects on the victims depending on how the victims as well as the society react to the situation. The negative effects of single parenting on Nasula are economic hardships and emotional distress. However, her knowledge of being a sole parent invigorates her to be hardworking. Sula, her daughter though made an object of scorn due to poverty, encourages herself to learn hard, hence she is academically successful.

To cope with their challenges as a single- family household, Nasula works hard as a mother. She is involved in different types of work simultaneously. Sula accepts her fate without complaints and does not worry about her predicament but rather her studies. The success of this family is admirable. This proves the assertion that, though single-parent families are beset with challenges, the individual's attitude towards the survival of the family determines its success or otherwise.

The society also has a role to play. The societal attitude towards a widow can either mar or lead to her progress in life. The society should therefore refrain from abuse of widows and to allow them to inherit what rightly belongs to them since the future of the children is at stake.

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