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# A Woman's Combat for Formal Education in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*

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Yélian Constant AGUESSY\*

Université de Parakou

**Abstract –** The present paper aims to point out the unfailing role of woman in the society. As a matter of fact, the narrative puts into relief an illiterate and young widow called Nasula who has perceived the importance of formal education for her little daughter, her only hope in life, hence the title of the novel *A Cowrie of Hope*. To achieve her goal, the round protagonist has stood up to a series of difficulties which at the same time inspires compassion and admiration. In this literary universe where two antithetical classes, the haves and have-nots, coexist, Sinyangwe deconstructs and reconstructs the intrinsic qualities of the fair sex bruised by structured male chauvinism. Despite the surrounding poverty in which Nasula rots, she highly believes that she will fight with the last straw of her blood to send Sula, her daughter to grade ten after the latter's successfully passing of grade nine, though she is alone in life and has no assistance. The study uses the feminist criticism which works for revaluing the images of woman, and Marxist critical approach, a reading that focuses on class struggle. The purpose of the study is to show, respecting the literary framework of the novel, in accordance with the writer's commitment in resetting woman within the community, that woman in general and the traditional woman in particular is the true artisan of her destiny.

**Key words:** Woman's combat, formal education, male chauvinism, commitment, social discrimination, poverty, artisan, destiny.

**Résumé –** Le présent article vise à montrer le rôle indéfectible que joue la femme au sein de la société pour se libérer du joug patriarcal. En réalité, le récit met en exergue une jeune femme veuve et illettrée du nom de Nasula qui a perçu l'importance de l'éducation formelle pour sa petite fille, son unique espoir dans la vie, d'où le titre de l'ouvrage *A Cowrie of Hope*. (*Un cauri d'espoir*). Pour réussir sa mission le protagoniste a surmonté une série de difficultés qui inspirent à la fois compassion et admiration. Dans cet univers littéraire où deux classes antithétiques coexistent : les riches et les pauvres, Sinyangwe déconstruit et reconstruit les valeurs intrinsèques du sexe faible meurtri par la phalocratie. Nonobstant la pauvreté ambiante dans laquelle Nasula vit, elle pense avec conviction qu'elle se battra avec la dernière goutte de son sang pour envoyer sa fille Sula au cours secondaire (niveau 10) après la brillante réussite de cette dernière au certificat (niveau 9), bien qu'elle vive seule et sans assistance. En se fondant sur l'environnement littéraire de l'œuvre et sur l'engagement de l'écrivain, la présente étude utilise de façon croisée, l'approche féministe qui œuvre pour la revalorisation de l'image de la femme dans la littérature et l'approche marxiste qui planche sur la lutte des classes, pour repositionner la femme dans la société traditionnelle ou moderne comme artisan de son propre destin.

**Mots-clés :** Combat de la femme, éducation formelle, phalocratie, engagement, pauvreté, discrimination sociale, artisan, destin

## 1- Introduction

With the collapse of the "Eastern Block", the world has undergone outstanding changes in every field of life. This has provoked an economic austerity that struck every country of the world in the "nineties". Indeed, this hard and complicated world atmosphere offers the Zambian writer, Binwell Sinyangwe, the source of inspiration to create his literary universe that he reveals to the readers in 2000. In fact, the writer unveils, through his fiction, the poor daily living conditions of the Zambians which are direct consequence of the devaluation of the monetary system of the majority of the African countries. So, in *A Cowrie of Hope*, the writer's novel on which I focus my study, the Zambian writer has taken interest in portraying a heroin who has been determined to overcome the rag poverty that was rampant in Zambian

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society in the "nineties". In the following extract, the narrator underscores the economic hardship and privation in Zambia:

These were the nineties. The late nineties. They were lean years. They were the years of each person for himself and hope only under the shadow of the gods. No one wanted to give because no one had anything to spare. The rains were bad and so the crops and the harvest were bad too. Without what to sell from the fields people had no money. Even chiefs and headmen who usually had a grain or two more than the ordinary people roamed the land without an *ngwee* in hands. The days were truly hard<sup>1</sup>

From the aforementioned quotation, it appears that the writer depicts the plight of the Zambians which results in the socio-political and economic trouble of the 1990s. My aim is not to make the inventory of the havocs of this situation but to show, through Sinyangwe's artistic and imaginative work, how an illiterate woman coming from the bottom of the social ladder succeeds in fulfilling her belief despite the setbacks occurred in her life. In fact, the narrative describes Nasula, a character who is victim of the patriarchal system. After the death of Winelo Chiswebe, her husband who is killed by police during robbery, her in-laws have unjustly accused her of the death of their son and deprived her of all the properties and wealth he left her for her survival and their only daughter in order to insure the education of the latter. Her refusal of the levirate, the fact of remarrying Isaki Chiswebe, Winelo's young brother leads to isolate and abandon her. As a result, she has to bring up Sula, her unique daughter, alone. This unbelievable revolution of the tradition on the behalf of a woman, a product of the same traditional education, confers on Nasula, at the same time, the characteristics of what the feminist critics, co-writers of *Les femmes dans la littérature africaine*, Denise Brahimi and Anne Trevarthen have termed "weak woman" and "woman in fight", meaning "femme faible" and "femme en lutte." What strikes readers' attention is that Sinyangwe has succeeded in presenting an illiterate woman who has valued education by showing a keen desire to send her daughter to school. Despite the condition extremely tight of the "nineties", Nasula has fought with the last straw of her blood to find the required means for the schooling of her daughter. After the sensitization meeting about how to write and read, and the women's rights organized by educated women which Nasula attends, she very soon realizes that formal education is the sine qua non condition that will liberate her from patriarchy and poverty. Since then the importance of education for her is no more bargaining.

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.<sup>2</sup>

The above quotation creates the click for the commitment to the emancipation of the woman. For Nasula, there is no doubt that education will offer good and bright future for fair sex. Indeed, the engagement of the protagonist of the novel arouses in

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<sup>1</sup> Binwell Sinyangwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England:Heinemann, 2000), p.14.

<sup>2</sup> Binwell Sinyangwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England Heinemann, 2000), p8

me some interrogations. How can an illiterate woman imagine that a good formal education puts an end to poverty? Isn't Sinyangwe insinuating that a woman represents the corner stone in the process of transformation of human being and his or her environment? Isn't the woman herself who can liberate the fair sex from male's chauvinism?

It is important to observe that the majority of the male writers such as Sembène Ousman, Chinua Achebe to name but few, have portrayed, through their fictions, the images of submissive women, even though Cheikh Hamidou Kane, in *The Ambiguous Adventure*, has introduced to his readership La Grande Royale who has greatly influenced the decisions of the community, one can contend that it is because she is a princess. On the other hand, very recently, I have come across Sinyangwe, a male writer who has empowered a female character and reset her within the society. Through his literary works, *Quills of Desire* published in 1993 and *A Cowrie of Hope* published in 2000, the Zambian novelist uses education as a tool to free the fair sex. In the two novels women become aware of the fact that they are the true artisan of their destiny. For this reason, Sinyangwe appears as the hen teeth amongst male novelists. Happily, things have gone the right way in the contemporary writings for the better, as Mary Kolawole Modupe has put " Some men have shown understanding and sincerity in the need to portray female characters as active heroines in making meaningful contributions to their societies"<sup>3</sup> I contend that Sinyangwe is one these rare men, portrayers of female characters in literature.

My study is decrypted into three axes: Women Living Conditions in *A Cowrie of Hope*, Education as a Tool for Salvation and An Epic Victory

## 2- Women Living Conditions in *A Cowrie of Hope*

In the history of African literature, male writers have portrayed different categories of images of women through their writings. So, in his literary works the late Chinua Achebe has valued traditional and submissive women in his novels except *The Anthill of the Savannah* through which the writer has portrayed Beatrice, a reactionary woman in search for social change and power. In the same vein, Sembene Ousmane in *Les bouts de bois de dieux*, presents a certain batch of women led by Ramatoulaye, who have rebelled against the bad working conditions that the railway colonial administration offered their husbands, by backing up the strike started by the railway workers. According to Denise Brahimi and Anne Trevarthen Ramatoulaye and her counterparts are qualified for women in fight, fight for the betterment of their husband's working conditions and that of their family. Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* depicts women in rebellion against the Arabic sexual abuses on the fair sex in order to preserve the woman dignity. La Grande Royale in *L'aventure ambiguë* gives the impression of being strong woman and that of power. Her charisma enables her to influence the communal decisions. In this respect, she takes the decision of sending the elite to the white school and imposes it on the community

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<sup>3</sup> Modupe Mary E. Kolawole, *Womanism and African Consciousness* (Trenton : Africa World Press, 1997), p93.

of the Diallobe. She perceives the importance of education and launches the witticism at the general surprise of the Diallobe people: "il faut aller apprendre chez eux l'art de vaincre sans avoir raison. [...] l'école étrangère est la forme nouvelle de la guerre que nous font ceux qui nous venus, et il faut y envoyer notre élite, en attendant d'y pousser tout le pays."<sup>4</sup>

In the foregoing quotation, Cheick Hamidou Kane insinuates that education is the way to preoccupations and worries of the Diallobe. Like La Grande Royal, Nasula decides to send her only daughter to formal school. Unlike Grande Royal "a have and charismatic woman, Nasula comes from what Karl Marx termed "lumpenproletariat", rag poverty which means that she belongs to the very bottom of the class hierarchy. The writer points out the protagonist's plight through the hyperbolic description he has made of her social condition.

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 gods' plant growing on poor soil without tendrils. Both her parents had died not long after she had come of age and had left her with nothing but herself.<sup>5</sup>

From the above citation it clearly appears that Nasula is born poor. Her poverty is congenitally inherited. In addition to this unavoidable poverty, the novelist also raises the issue of loss of African values which are solidarity, sharing of communal values expression of compassion to social unhappiness or public festivities to a happy event. This communal solidarity is manifest in *Things Fall Apart* at two levels. First of all, solidarity is manifest during Obierika's, (Okonkwo's best friend) daughter's wedding ceremony for which all the women of the neighboring compounds have gathered for assistance and support. Then, when social misfortune has struck Okonkwo, Obierika has been of great assistance and support. Though this second illustration does not directly concern women, it is still a manifestation of communal solidarity. Fortunately, the Zambian novelist redeems himself by showing the attitude of Nalukwi, Nasula's old and best friend towards her daughter and herself that somewhere there is still hope for the African values. In reality, in Nasula's gloomy and dark days Nalukwi appears as a best friend of childhood, the messiah, by helping her overcome her difficulties. The main protagonist remembering Nalukwi's salvation to her daughter says: "For the time being just know that without Nalukwi, you and I might not be here today."<sup>6</sup> Not only is she abandoned and left in misery and poverty, but she has also suffered a lot from the throes of patriarchy

As reported in the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, patriarchy means "control or government by men, a society or country governed by men."<sup>7</sup> In other words, *Dicos Encarta* defines patriarchy as "a social system in which men are

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<sup>4</sup> Kane Hamidou, Cheick, *L'aventure ambiguie*. (Julliard, 1961) p48.

<sup>5</sup> Binwell Sinyangwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England:Heinemann, 2000), p 4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>7</sup> Jonathan Crowther, Kathryn Kavanagh and Michael Ashby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995 5<sup>th</sup> ed, p 849.

regarded as the authority within the family and society, and in which power and possessions are passed on from father to son.”<sup>8</sup> From the two quotations above, it appears, clearly, that women are mentioned nowhere, in a word they do not play important roles in the patriarchal social system. As for me, patriarchy is a pervasive social system through which men deny women all rights to social properties and politics. Therefore, men use their authoritative position to keep women under domination and the inferiority state. The below quotation from Ptah Hotep, an Egyptian writer, around 2000 BC sheds light on the patriarchal beliefs “If you are a man of note, found for yourself a household, and love your wife at home, as it beseems. Fill her belly, clothe her back. . . . But hold her back from getting the mastery. Remember that her eye is her storm wind, and her vulva and mouth are her Strength.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, this patriarchal ideology weakens women culturally, politically and economically. Sinyangwe offers his readership how the patriarchal ideology imposes sufferings on women through Nasula, a young widow in the novel under study.

Though Nasula’s husband Winelo Chiswebe has been shot to death during a robbery in which he acted as a gang lead, his relatives accused her of killing him. So, the allegation against her is expressed in the following citation “How they turn against her. Blamed her for the death of the husband. People of the world, how could anyone blame her for the death of a man who had been shot by policemen while he was stealing”<sup>10</sup> In substance, the preceding quotation addresses the vulnerability of the status of women within the society structured by male chauvinism. This unquestioned social injustice makes women suffer a lot. Not satisfying of accusing of murder her of their son, Nasula’s in-laws wanted her to remarry the womanizer Isaki Chiswebe the younger brother of the deceased Winelo. How can a woman accused of the murder of one of yours be required to remarry one of yours? What a contradiction! In a word, Sinyangwe unveils through his novel the cracks and the incoherences in the African tradition. Happily, the protagonist opposed to her in-laws’ decisions of remarrying Isaki Chiswebe and endorsed all the havocs caused by her refusal. “After the burial, the news was broken to her that Isaki Chiswebe would be taking over as her husband. She knew Isaki and his ways in things of the flesh very well. She also now knew the Chiswebe family too well to remain married to one of its members. She refused to be married to Isaki”<sup>11</sup>. In effect, her determination to stand ground to levitate confers on her the characteristics of a strong and revolutionary woman. She has broken the bondage to tradition and opens to emancipation though such a behavior has a price to be paid for. As a result, Nasula was dispossessed of all the properties that the late Winelo Chiswebe left her and her daughter by her in-laws. She and Sula were chased from home like a fish failing on

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<sup>8</sup> Microsoft® Encarta® 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. Tous droits réservés.

<sup>9</sup> [http://history-world.org/Civilization,%20women\\_in\\_patriarchal\\_societies.htm](http://history-world.org/Civilization,%20women_in_patriarchal_societies.htm) 11h 58 16-08-2014

<sup>10</sup> Binwell Sinyangwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England:Heinemann, 2000), p 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid , p8.

the sand beach. The narrator conjures up in the coming excerpt the circumstances of the expropriation

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 her child before she found money for her travel and returned to the village.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, her intuitive denial to remarry Isaki Chiswebe has rightly saved her from a fatal destiny. For, Isaki has suffered of HIV and died from Aids. By preserving her dignity, she avoids death. Here, the round protagonist witnesses the disastrous moment of Isaki's existence and his three wives "Nobody had told her, but she could tell what it was, the disease that had afflicted Isaki and his three wives. It was the new, unmentionable disease of the world that came of the taste of fresh, the one that made thin before taking you, the disease of today."<sup>13</sup>

In a nutshell, rag poverty, occurrence of setbacks and drastic living conditions do not prevent Nasula from fighting for the schooling of her daughter Sula.

### 3- Education as a Tool of Salvation

The core topic of the whole novel is centered on the acquisition of formal education. What is then education? According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* of current English, education is "a process of training and instruction, especially of children and young people in schools, colleges, etc. which is designed to give knowledge and develop skills. From this definition education appears an imperative condition in the process of children growth. However it is not every growing child who has the right to it as it is stated in the United Nations' declarations of the children's rights. "The child is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He / she shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgement, and his sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society"<sup>14</sup>. In fact, this part of the United Nations' declaration of children's rights to education clearly sets forth the necessity and importance of education for children as members of the society. In Sinyangwe's literary universe appears Nasula who understands, in the same perspective the necessity and importance of the formal education for her daughter Sula. In effect, the Zambian writer, Sinyangwe portrays Nasula, a young widow who is fighting for formal education for her unique daughter Sula, for education offers independence and freedom "what she had seen and heard and gone through along their pathways, had awakened her to the indignities and injustices of

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<sup>12</sup> Binwell Sinyangwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), pp9-10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p27.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/resources/child.asp> 20/8/2014 17h 56mn

a woman who could only put her life in the hands of a man, and to the possibility of a good education giving to a woman independence and freedom”<sup>15</sup> In the quotation above Nasula is conjuring up her sufferings with Chiswebe Winelo because of her lack of education. That is the reason why she, as an illiterate woman, has committed to sending her daughter to school. She says this as regards Sula’s education “She understood the importance of education and wanted her daughter to go far with her schooling. She understood the unfairness of the life of a woman and craved for emancipation, freedom and independence in the life of her daughter. Emancipation, freedom and independence from men.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, it is because she does not want Sula to undergo the same plight as herself that she is ready to scarify her own life for the education of her daughter. But does Nasula have the means of her ambitions? From the portrayal by Sinyagwe I have learnt that Nasula comes from a poor family and has no support in life.

The evidence of this hard existence is lived in the excerpt “Nasula was poverty, she was loneliness and aloneness. Suffering was her life. She wore it like her own skin [...] Nasula had no means and no dependable support.”<sup>17</sup> It appears crystal clear that her new adventure that is sending her daughter to school will worsen her living condition. In truth, she has come across some limitations in the fulfilment of her noble ambition; however, Nasula has not despaired for she knows that as a saying goes “where there is a will there is a way” It is worth observing that after the death of Winelo Chiswebe, Nasula had to bring Sula up alone and ensure her schooling from primary school to grade nine at Senga Hill Basic School where Sula successfully passed her elementary certificate. But, now, before Sula goes to grade ten, secondary school, St Theresa Girls in Kasama, Nasula has to pay the price of one hundred thousand *kwacha* for the school enrolment and other requirements for Sula. Can she afford this amount of money seen her chronic poverty? Where will she get it? Since Nasula is poor, it will not be easy for her to gather the amount of money for Sula’s schooling. Coming to the reality of African schools, socio-economic constraints constitute the cause of high proportion of dropout and non-enrolment. In effect, the economic constraints are the most frequently mentioned explanations given by the parents, children and teachers for non-enrolment and dropout. In the same vein, before the introduction of free primary education, many parents’ lack of money to meet school fees was the most frequent reasons given for girls’ school dropout and non-enrolment. Referring to the novel under study it is my contention that Nasula the round character of *A Cowrie of Hope* lives the same lack of money and belong to this batch of incapable parents. Challenging her husband during a dispute, Nasula recognises unconsciously her poverty in the following terms “I am poor and a woman, but you do not stop being a human being when you are poor or woman.<sup>18</sup> This state of being poor and woman has badly impacted her life and her daughters’

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<sup>15</sup> Binwell Sinyagwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), p6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p4.

<sup>18</sup> Binwell Sinyagwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England:Heinemann, 2000), p7.

education. As a matter of fact, she has the desire and will to send her daughter to school but the means do not follow as she would expect it. Many factors hardly prevent Nasula from achieving her ambition. All in all, among the factors I can name the premature death of her husband, the inexistence of heritage from her parents' sides, the dispossession by her in-laws and the poor output of her agricultural harvest. However, she has her preoccupation at stake. Nasula, though illiterate, believes in education. She knows that the education of her daughter must help change her living conditions. Therefore, her attendance of some educated women's meeting sheds light on her vision on education

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 freedom of 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, the need for a woman to stand on her own.<sup>19</sup>

Through the quotation above, it is clearly stated that education offers better life quality, improved health care, skilled workforce, better employment opportunities, high salaries, increased savings and greater opportunities for the future. It is rightly the reason why she has not been discouraged when she has been confronted with financial difficulties. Quite the reserve, Nasula has been galvanized into her search for the school fees that she needs for the enrolment of her daughter. It is no doubt that the Zambian writer, not only is he repositioning woman in general and the African one in particular in her traditional role, that is ensuring the education of her children, but also is pointing out that a woman is the pillar of the society. As for Sinyangwe no society, community can be constructed without woman's contribution. For the writer, a woman who will educate the society must be, first of all, educated. A woman is the cornerstone in the edification of her community. It is in fact, what Nasula has understood when she engages in the fight for her Sula's education. As a saying goes, 'to educate a girl is to educate a whole nation'. So, as believers believe that Jesus Christ is 'salvation', Nasula too believes that education will bring to herself and Sula 'salvation'. It is the reason why she is ready to endanger herself by travelling on foot from Swelini to Mangano even at nights, through a wild forest. Sinyangwe retells his protagonist braveness in these terms:

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 the ghostly womb of untampered nature, the woman walked the distance to Mangano. Alone, unescorted by man. Nasula was courage.<sup>20</sup>

In the quotation above, the repetition of walk, the use of forest, dense, virginity, silence and alone show Nasula's outstanding character the great importance that Nasula attaches to the education of her daughter. So, her intrepidity and the durability of the travel reveal that Nasula is a woman in fight for a woman's sake.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p8.

<sup>20</sup> Binwell Sinyagwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), p14.

Here also, the Zambian novelist is praising the intrepidity and determination of the main protagonist of his work.

Then gradually, the land became more sparsely vegetated and began its slope towards Mangano. Her step has been quick and strong when the air had been wet with mist and dew and she had been fresh. Now she was tired, hungry and thirsty. Her step was slower and weaker. Still, with the tenacity of a cheetah and the determination of a tortoise, Nasula tackled the distance steadily, surely alone<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, though her voyage to Mangano has been unfruitful, Nasula has not given up her faith in sending her daughter to school. Quite the opposite, the round character has overcome all the unhappy setbacks that occur in the achievement of her dearest ambition and in the end comes to epic victory.

#### 4- An Epic Victory

In the previous section I have demonstrated that the protagonist of the novel under study experiences a very hard living condition like poverty, sufferings etc. But this state of being did not prevent her from achieving her dearest hope. As a matter of fact, I have already pointed out that Nasula's dream is to send Sula to secondary school provided that she gets one hundred thousand *kwacha*. Though she cannot afford the required money, she did not cross her arms. Sinyangwe has portrayed a woman fighting for the transformation of her destiny and that of her daughter. As a proof in the novel she has worked for others, expecting to gather her daughter's school fee, unfortunately she has not been paid. Equally, Nasula has farmed for the same objective but there also, the output has not met her expectations for the harvest was bad that year. The writer expresses the austerity of the year in the citation below "The rains were bad and so the crops and the harvest were bad too. Without what to sell from the fields people had no money."<sup>22</sup> From this excerpt, money in the nineties became a hen's teeth. However, Nasula has to collect it in order to respond to her responsibility of mother. She was almost in deadlock when providentially her childhood friend Nalukwi suggested her to bring her to Kamwala market in Lusaka to sell the rest of her bean because this quality of bean is running after at Kamwala. Once more, Nasula is giving a new hope. According to her friend's say, the sale of the sack of bean will enable to pay Sula's enrolment fee. So, this information resuscitates Nasula. Here the writer exposes her enthusiasm after hearing Nalukwi

Beans are very expensive in Lusaka at this time of the year; there are very few kinds available, especially the type that you grow in Mbala, the yellow and white bean. Even if you have just one bag, it will give you the one hundred thousand of kwacha that you need to send the child to school. Are you talking, Nalukwi? Nasula's eyes and mouth were suddenly wide with curiosity.<sup>23</sup>

The aforementioned succinctly illustrates that women have to join together in order to change their living conditions. By doing so, they will free themselves from

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Binwell Sinyangwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), p14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p53.

patriarchy. After their arrival to Kwamala market in Lusaka everything presaged that Nasula will have a good harvest and return soon, for the quality of her bean is running after by potential customers. However, a catalyst situation intervenes and changes the normal course of events. As I have proved through this study nothing goes smoothly and straight ahead for Nasula for her life is punctuated with setbacks. But, the paradox is that she never loses hope. As a matter of fact, at Kamwala market a wrong, crook and thief customer comes her way and smartly goes away with Nasula's precious commodity without paying her the agreed price. "The nearby vendors confirmed her fears. It was clear that the man had cheated her out of her bag of beans."<sup>24</sup> Once more, Nasula's dream of sending her daughter to secondary school, St Theresa Girls in Kasama becomes a mere illusion. In effect, she has been victim of her own naivety and excess of joy. Profiting from her inexperience and ignorance of the realities of the city, Gode Silavwe offered her a golden price which will transform her destiny. But the exhilaration will be of short duration. Her existence only echoes darkness. From this catalyst situation, Sinyangwe points out that in patriarchal society man will never help woman grow and thereby constitutes a handicap to her development. Man will always assist woman for petty position in the society.

In fact, this impression of mine is backed up by the attitude of domination of the male vendor who has aided Nasula for the travel to go back home. Though he has the possibility, after hearing her plight and witnessing her misfortune, of giving her more money to solve her problems, he prefers to offer her just the chance to go back home. Therefore, Nasula will keep on experiencing sufferings, poverty and misery etc. On her way back home with bare hands almost disappointed the writer makes an account of her state of being through some interrogations "Suffering woman, what is it that you have done to deserve this misfortune? What trouble have you caused against the gods? What have you spat on the shrine of your ancestors?"<sup>25</sup> Happily, discouragement is not Nasula. On the verge of despair, she gathers all her strength and flashes again her target and decides at half way to return to Lusaka by begging the pardon of the conductor to reimburse her the money of the rest of the voyage, which has been done with the driver's intervention Then, she comes back to the market in search for the thief of the hope of her 'cowrie of hope' She has been very determined. Nasula has nothing to lose if not her own life and she is ready to sacrifice it for the sake of daughter. So, like a madwoman, she has wandered in Lusaka for days and nights almost in vain. She has slept in the open air barely eating and without washing herself because of male's wickedness. As a saying goes, 'what the woman wants God wants it' Contrary to all expectations, Nasula has found Gode Silavwe's yellow car, and posted herself nearby the vehicle. Seeing Gode comes towards the car Nasula gathers all her energy braving the dangerousness and the

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<sup>24</sup> Binwell Sinyagwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), p84.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid,p85.

violence of the hooligan. She openly attacks the crook and she asks for payment or return of her bag of beans

'You will not go anywhere until you give my bag of beans or the money for it, she cried out. 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'<sup>26</sup>

Gode's violent reaction leads to an epic fight that one would qualify as the fight between David and Goliath in the Holy Bible:

Gode Slavwe engaged the engine. The car jerked into motion. Nasula seized hold of the handle of the rear door and pulled at it. It opened. By chance Gode had not locked it. Now the vehicle was gathering momentum. The door slept out of her hand and banged itself closed again as she fell slightly behind. But as she opened the door, the seat-belt on that side of the car had fallen out. Now she saw the wide black belt hanging from under the bottom edge of the rear door with the metallic hook as its end on the ground and shining brightly in the sun. She lunged forward and grabbed the belt with her left hand, letting her bag of sackcloth drop from her right shoulder. The car pulled at her with a sudden and violent force. She fell down with equal suddenness and violence, her *citenge* and her tropical sandals dropping off her like beans from a dry pod that had split open after being struck against a hard stick. There was, suddenly a deafening noise of whistling and yelling from a terrified crowd warning the driver of the fleeing car that he was going to kill a person. One instant more and the car would have started pulling her along. But, in the nick of time, Gode stopped the car and switched off the engine. Nasula clung to the seat-belt firmly, now with both hands, in a sad coil, seething and trembling, her eyes tightly closed in prayer. 'Get up,' someone standing nearby said to her after a while. 'It is over and all right, madam, you can now get up.' She looked up and saw it was a policeman in the familiar khaki uniform, holding a gun.<sup>27</sup>

In the aforesaid excerpt, the story reaches its climax when Gode, the outlaw attempts to crush the poor and helpless Nasula with his car. But the latter stands ground and grabs one of the door of the car and later, the salutary seat-belt risking her life like the actors in western films attracting public attention to the scene. Happily, she has been saved in the nick of time by a young providential policeman on duty in the place. Determination, courage, temerity and feat on Nasula's behalf confer on her at the same time compassion, pity and admiration from the onlookers. Furthermore, the young policeman brought the case to his bosses at the police station where Nasula has been prone to a scene of corruption between Gode and the careless, imprudent and greedy inspector. Her hope has vanished and she plunged her into a new deadlock. However, as usual, Nasula has not been discouraged and after reflection brought desperately the case to the highest boss of this police station. As there still is the providence for the poor, the boss of this police station has said the law and justice has been rendered to Nasula. As a result, Gode has been wanted and brought back to the station and paid more money to her than he is normally supposed to. "One hundred and fifty thousand kwacha instead of one hundred thousand kwacha?"<sup>28</sup> Finally Gode was put in jail and his accomplice inspector has been suspended. In the quotation below, the high boss penalizes the two

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<sup>26</sup> Binwell Sinyagwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), p125.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid,pp127-128.

<sup>28</sup> Binwell Sinyagwe, *A Cowrie of Hope*. (England: Heinemann, 2000), p142.

accomplices. "Take this man to the Criminal Investigation Department"<sup>29</sup> and "I have suspended you, while the charges against you are investigated and you are on suspension starting from now."<sup>30</sup> If one can characterize Nasula's achievement as a victory, then it is an epic victory. The best lesson one can draw from this apotheosis is that whatever the situation, woman needs the collaboration of a man of good moral in her fight for liberation from male's chauvinism, for Nasula has been rescued four times by men in the novel.

What is very striking and draws mankind attention is that Sinyangwe depicts in his novel a hermit woman in fight against the whole social patriarchal superstructure. Thus, the writer is calling up the fair sex to stand up like one and lone person, like the brave and intrepid Nasula to overcome patriarchy and snatch their rights from men.

## 5- Conclusion

The objective of this paper has been to show the unfailing role of a woman in the society in the matter of education. After reading the story narrated in *A Cowrie of Hope*, I have come to the conviction that a woman, whether traditional or modern is the masterpiece of the education of her offspring. It becomes imperative to woman to go to school in order to snatch her rights of good living condition and emancipation from a selfish patriarchy. Women, like Nasula must struggle hard to send their daughters to school. Education appears as a sine qua non condition for women to overcome social male chauvinism. It is also worthy noticing that a woman must be brave, perseverant, determined and have her target at stake like Nasula. Collaboration between women and men of good moral should be vividly enticed for the downfall of the social superstructure established by patriarchy. All in all, my contention, in this paper is that education is and will be the remedy to the problems of women within a society dominated by men.

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