



## **Exploring Identity and Feminine Empowerment in Joanne Harris's The Lollipop Shoes: A Journey through the Complexities of Bullying and Motherhood**

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ABSTRACT :

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This paper focuses on Joanne Harris's novel *The Lollipop Shoes* (also known as *The Girl with No Shadow*), focusing on its intricate exploration of self-identity, feminine empowerment, and the complexities of bullying and motherhood. The narrative follows the journeys of Vianne Rocher and her daughters, Anouk and Rosette, as well as the mysterious Zoïe de l'Alba. This paper highlights the struggles of Vianne to reconcile her magical heritage with her desire for a normal life, Anouk's quest for independence amidst social expectations, and Zoïe's manipulative charm. Harris portrays the resilience and strength of women, particularly through the lens of motherhood, emphasizing Vianne's concerned dedication to her daughters. This study underscores the importance of embracing one's true self and the transformative power of self-acceptance and authenticity, illustrating how literature fosters empathy, reflection, and personal growth by presenting diverse perspectives and challenging social norms.

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**Keywords :** Self- Identity, Feminine empowerment, Bullying, Motherhood, Manipulation

Literature provides a platform for writers to explore the depths of human experiences, exploring the struggles, conflicts, and triumphs that arise from the quest for self-discovery and the desire through literature. Readers can gain insights from different perspectives, cultures, and experiences, fostering empathy and understanding. Through encountering characters that struggle with questions of identity and belonging. Readers are encouraged to reflect on their own perception of identity and connection to the world, that builds reflection and personal development. Moreover, through featuring a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, literature has the ability to challenge social customs and prejudice.

Joanne Harris is a British writer known for her novels, particularly those featuring themes of magic, folklore and culinary delights. Her storytelling is characterized by vivid imagery, richly developed characters and intricate plots that blend realism with elements of fantasy or the supernatural elements. Her writing style often reflects her passion for food and culinary traditions. The characters of Harris are often portrayed as strong-willed, free-spirited and captivating.

*The Lollipop Shoes*, also known as *The Girl with No Shadow* is a novel by Joanne Harris, published in 2007. This book is a sequel to Harris's popular novel *Chocolat*, continuing the story of Vianne Rocher and her daughters, Anouk and Rosette. The novel highlights strong female characters and their journeys toward self-discovery and empowerment. Vianne's evolution, Zoïe's manipulative strength, and Anouk's story provide a multi-dimensional look at women's resilience and power. The novel delves deeply into the themes of self-identity and transformation. Vianne's struggle to reconcile her true self with the identity she adopts to fit into society resonates with contemporary readers struggles with identity and society's expectations. She highlights the depth of suffering women experience and how their lives have been ruined by tradition in a unique writing style. This paper highlights the quest for how women transformed themselves into people who were capable of dealing with difficult situations.

Many contemporary British authors explore issues of identity through characters struggling with race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, class, and more. For instance works like "White Teeth," by Zadie Smith is known for exploring the complexity of multicultural identities. In a cross-cultural, cosmopolitan environment like London, her characters frequently struggle with issues of identity, cultural heritage, and belonging. In works like "Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit" and "Written on the Body" by Jeanette Winterson is well-known for her close study of sexuality and gender identity. Her poetry frequently explores the complexities of personal identity and desire by blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. Their works invite readers to contemplate the complexities of self- identity, belonging, and the ever-changing landscapes of identity.

Writers such as Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Virginia Woolf, Zadie Smith, and many others wrote about women's empowerment. Male writers encouraged this movement of feminine empowerment and made suggestions to society to alter their perceptions of women. Many works on

empowering women have been written, including satires, novels, short stories, and poetry. All these writers demonstrate how they view empowerment as the relationship between structure and society. Firstly, empowerment is a multidimensional concept that may be applied across a wide range of situations and settings. The literary criticism of the 20th century acknowledged the power of women's writings as a way of examining patriarchal systems of society and understanding the frustrations, desires and expectations of women within them. Simone de Beauvoir in her work "The Second Sex" states,

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine."(273)

She suggests that womanhood is not innate but constructed by society. It asserts that societal influences, rather than biological or individual traits, shape the female identity. Women's roles, behaviors, and characteristics are products of cultural norms and historical constructs, rather than predetermined destinies.

Harris portrays how Vianne and her daughters navigate their way through life's challenges, often facing discrimination and prejudice due to their unconventional lifestyle and magical abilities. Despite these obstacles, they remain resilient and independent, embracing their identities and talents. In this narrative, Harris delves into the complexities of self-discovery, familial bonds, and the search for belonging against the backdrop of a vibrant and enchanting setting of Paris. Through the intertwining plot of Vianne Rocher, Anouk Rocher, and the mysterious newcomer, Zozie de l'Alba, Harris explores how individuals address their challenges with their identities amidst society's expectations, personal desires, and the influences of others.

The city of Paris serves as a backdrop for the characters journey of self-discovery, its labyrinthine streets mirroring the complexities of identity. As Vianne, Anouk, and Zozie navigate the city's winding pathways and hidden corners, they face their innermost fears and desires. Paris becomes a metaphorical playground for the exploration of identity, its rich history and diverse culture offering endless possibilities for self-expression and reinvention.

As a protagonist, Vianne has left her magical past and moved to Montmartre, Paris under the name Yanne Charbonneau. Vianne embodies a flux in her identity, constantly switching her roles as a mother, a witch, and a woman seeking personal fulfillment. "*Witches don't just quit, Vianne, Skills like ours beg to be used.*"(Harris 191). Throughout the novel, Vianne struggles with her past and her heritage, particularly her mystical powers inherited from her mother. These aspects of her identity both empower and burden her, shaping her interactions with others and her understanding of herself.

"No magic, of course. Well, is that so bad? There's comfort and safety and friendship and love. Isn't that enough for us? Haven't we been down the other road?(Harris 261)

Vianne's attempts to maintain her magical skills with her desire for a normal lifestyle symbolized by her decision to start a chocolaterie in Montmartre is used to illustrate her journey towards self-acceptance. Anouk Rocher, Vianne's daughter, now called as Annie in Paris, she struggles with questions of identity as she turns from childhood to adolescence. She is caught between her mother's unconventional lifestyle and society's expectations. Anouk has been bullied by her classmates for her appearance and her Past life. "*looks weird,*" "*like Afro hair*"(Harris 109). Harris portrays bullying through the characters Suzanne Prudhomme and Chantal who comments on her hair and appearance and also bullies her by commenting about her family and lifestyle.

"I'm not weird, I said. "I'm just different".

"What's so bad about being different?" (Harris 111)

Anouk seeks to define herself independently, and she overcomes from bully through the arrival of Zozie de l'Alba, a charismatic and manipulative figure, Anouk is drawn to Zozie's elegance and promises of acceptance, which further influences her view of identity. As she deals with peer pressure, her first love, and her desire to break out from her mother's shadow, Anouk's quest for identity gives an intriguing view into the challenges of adolescence. Zozie de l'Alba is a representation of a darker identity that is marked by deception and manipulation. Throughout the main part of the plot, Zozie adopts different identities to fit her needs, leaving her true identity hidden. Her incapability to possess a specific identity gives her the ability to attract and manipulate others by taking advantage of their flaws.

"That uncomfortable feeling of watching myself -the Vianne Rocher I used to be- reborn in the person of Zozie de l'Alba ,using my methods ,speaking my lines, daring me to challenge her."(Harris 443)

Harris portrays Zozie as a vibrant, fearless and dangerously appealing character and she was everything Vianne used to in her past life. But Vianne adopted a new identity as Yanne and tries to escape from her past shadows just to protect her daughters from the world of magic and black men. Islam states that, "The inclusion of a new character, Zozie de l'Alba, just like Vianne, has been introduced but considered to be more of a mysterious version of Vianne."(40)

Many literary works portray mothers as embodiments of strength, resilience, and sacrifice. These narratives can highlight the empowerment that comes from these attributes, showcasing mothers as central figures who overcome adversity. Literature that focuses on the communal aspects of motherhood, such as support networks among mothers or inter-generational relationships, can underscore themes of empowerment through solidarity and mutual

support. It's important to recognize the diversity of experiences and narratives around motherhood. Simone de Beauvoir about motherhood in "The Second Sex" states, "In comparison, the monthly bother seems a blessing; now the return of the red flow is anxiously watched for, that flow which had seemed horrifying to the young girl and for which she was consoled by the promised joys of motherhood." (473)

Contemporary British literature often includes voices from different cultural, racial, and social backgrounds, providing a richer, more varied exploration of how motherhood can be empowering. Authors like Doris Lessing, Angela Carter, and Zadie Smith have written works where motherhood is depicted as a source of strength and identity for women. For instance, In "White Teeth" by Zadie Smith, characters like Clara and Irie Jones navigate their identities as mothers and women of color in a multicultural Britain, showing how motherhood intersects with issues of race and empowerment.

Harris portrayed the role of motherhood through the character Vianne. Her primary motivation is to safeguard and protect her daughters Anouk and Rosette. "You choose your family, As I chose you and you chose me." (Harris 131). Her maternal instincts are strong and she is willing to sacrifice her happiness and identity only for her daughters. Vianne's decisions are largely influenced by her role as a mother showcasing her selflessness and protective nature. "Your evil aunt, corrupting you with magic and shoes." (Harris 336). Especially to protect her daughters from Zoie's manipulation, as Anouk was attracted towards Zoie's elegance and her desire to break out from her mother's shadow. Thus, Vianne's protective nature is highlighted when she senses the threat posed by Zoie de l'Alba. Vianne's responsibility as a mother becomes even more challenging by the specific needs of her younger daughter, Rosette. Throughout the novel, Vianne remains dedicated to care for Rosette and concerned about her future. This aspect of the narrative illustrates additional challenges experienced by mothers of children with disabilities. "I'm a free spirit, don't forget, And I go wherever the wind takes me." (Harris 574). Vianne undergoes a significant transformation toward the end of the narration. In order to effectively protect and raise her daughters, she understands the importance of embracing her true identity, especially her magical skills. This acceptance represents her growth and understanding of motherhood.

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## CONCLUSION :

This Paper highlights how Joanne Harris's *The Lollipop Shoes* intricately explored self-identity and feminine empowerment through the complexities of bullying and motherhood through the journeys of Vianne, Anouk, and Zoie. This paper has focused mainly on Vianne's struggles with her past and present identities, balancing her magical abilities with her desire for a normal life. Anouk, transitioning from childhood to adolescence, faces bullying and seeks her identity amidst social pressures and Zoie's manipulative charm all contribute to a significant narrative of characters questioning their identities. It also highlights motherhood as a central motif, depicting Vianne's unwavering dedication to protecting her daughters despite challenges, including Rosette's disabilities. Ultimately, this paper presents Vianne's resilience and transformation as she balances her roles as a mother, a witch, and a woman seeking a sense of fulfillment in life. It also emphasizes the importance of embracing one's true self and the power that comes from self-acceptance and authenticity shaped by the magic and norms of the society. Readers could also find connection with Anouk's journey through adolescence, which was highlighted by bullying and a search for identity, as it provides a psychological perspective on the difficulties faced by adolescents in their teenage years. Through examining different points of view and struggles associated with identity, this paper shows how Harris's novel encourages readers to get a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

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