Feminism in Times of Darkness: Proto-Feminist Attempts in Medieval and Renaissance Periods[1]

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Abstract

Determining the precise and definitive meaning of feminism is a challenging task in and of itself. However, it is abundantly clear that the movement has undergone numerous periods characterised by protests, repression, and redefinitions in accordance with the objectives of its adherents; thus, it is practically futile to explicitly identify the term and school. It is still feasible to emphasize that feminism encompasses judicial, political, economic, and social equality between both genders. Although the term, feminism, was not encountered in the literary world until the late nineteenth century, it would be unjust to put forth that there were no proto-feminist experimentations. Despite the absence of tangible endeavours towards authentic conscious feminist movements during the Middle Ages, women began to scrutinise their societal positions ever since that time. Although they do not align with the feminist ideology, their efforts to assert their independence within patriarchal societies are noteworthy; thus, they could be categorised as proto-feminists. Their primary concerns for centuries have been reclaiming their stolen identities and their insistence on elevating their own existence within the patriarchal system. Initially crippled by sexual, economic, judicial, political, educational, and civilian discrimination, a portion of them were subsequently subdued by an illuminating force, despite the fact that they had opponents among their own sex-fellows. Moreover, through literature, writing, and active engagement in demonstrations against the prevailing social order, women have gradually gained certain liberties. The dissemination of feminist movements commenced in this manner, initially inadvertently but with a deliberate intention, persisting for centuries. As such, this article seeks to sketch the portrait of proto-feminist attempts in the Medieval Age and Renaissance by way of textual analysis and references to prominent female figures of the periods.

***Keywords*:** feminism, Medieval Age, Renaissance, proto-feminism

[1] This study is the revised version of a chapter in the author's unpublished Master's Thesis titled "A Third World Feminist Approach to Femaleness as Inferior to Maleness in Doris Lessing's *The Grass Is Singing* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*" (Middle East Technical University, 2014).

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