



CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN LAW AND SOCIETY

# Muslim Women's Quest for Justice

Law and Activism in India

Mengia Hong Tschalaer

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## Muslim Women's Quest for Justice

*Muslim Women's Quest for Justice* is an urban ethnographic study of several Muslim women's organisations in northern India. These organisations work to carve out spaces that allow for the articulation of alternative experiences and conceptions of religion and justice that challenge Islamic orthodoxy as well as the monopoly of the Indian state in the domain of family law. While most analyses on reform efforts within Muslim family law in India have focused on women's protection within the state legal system, this book offers the rare opportunity to understand how organised groups of Muslim women's rights activists contest marginalising forces present in the family and criminal courts, Shariat courts, local mosques, workplace, legislature and legal documents. In doing so, the author pushes against troubling assumptions that Islam is incompatible with ideas of women's rights and that the State is the only dispenser of justice. This book offers new directions for studies on the dispersed nature of women's identities in Islamic family law. It suggests the ways in which non-state regulated legal bodies can assist in upholding the rights, dignity, and freedom of Muslim women. This book will help scholars in exploring the intricate realities of socio-legal reform within contested local, national and transnational settings. It is especially valuable to those in the field of feminist legal studies, law and society, sociology, anthropology, Islamic studies and post colonialism. It is further of interest to policy-makers, legal advocates, and human and women's rights groups dedicated to finding integrated grassroots solutions toward the realisation of gender justice.

**Mengia Hong Tschalaer** teaches at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. She is a legal anthropologist with a focus on the relationship between politics of knowledge production, women's subjectivities, law, and Islam in contemporary India. Her scholarship specifically examines the micro-realities that shape people's understanding of women's rights and religion. She was a Visiting Scholar and Research Fellow at the Center for Gender and Sexuality Law, Columbia Law School and has also taught undergraduate courses on intersectionality, gender and sexuality, law and society, and culture and identity at the City University of New York and Columbia University.

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To  
all the Muslim women  
who have so generously shared their stories with me

To  
my children Anaïs Faye and Jasper Soon  
who had to relinquish their time with me to the writing of this book

To  
my parents  
who taught me to pursue my goals and aspirations and never give up

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