

## Panthers in parliament: dalits, caste, and political power in South India

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### Abstrak

In the late 1990s, a group representing Dalits in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu called the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi-or Liberation Panthers Party-shook the established social and political structures. For over a decade they boycotted elections, questioning the legitimacy of institutions that failed to implement constitutional provisions and allowed casteism to persist. The Panthers conducted mass awareness campaigns for Dalit liberation, instilling a sense of empowerment in a hitherto marginalized population. Eventually, labelled as extremists and alienated by the State, the Panthers were pushed into electoral politics. How the Panthers mobilized themselves and managed to effect changes in Tamil Nadus politics is the main premise of this ethnographic account. Looking into the processes of transition therein, the author discusses how caste considerations inform and underpin politics in the state and whether the Panthers will erode or adapt to hegemonic caste power. With its micro-empirical focus on identity politics in Tamil Nadu, the book also explores diverse dimensions of mobilization and ways in which contentious politics alters political regimes.