This chapter provides the historical background to Jammu and Kashmir from the establishment of the kingdom of Jammu and Kashmir in the mid-nineteenth century to the inception of the ‘Kashmir question’ in 1947 and finally to the conflict which began in 1989–90. The chapter then discusses the Kashmiri Pandits who have their own history of the region. There is controversy with regards to the causes of the Pandit exodus, with blame laid at both Kashmiri nationalists and the Indian state. The account of the Pandit exodus is thus subject to confusion and denial. This chapter attempts to reconstruct a narrative of the exodus through newspaper archives and interviews and conversations with the Pandits themselves. The emergent narrative, while partial reveals the fissures with regards to location of the Pandits in Kashmiri and Indian politics and also raises questions regarding accounts of violence in South Asia at large.

Since 1989, Jammu and Kashmir has been affected by conflict between the Indian state and a movement demanding independence. This book explores the effect of that conflict on the Hindu Pandit minority of the Kashmir Valley. The displacement of the Kashmir Pandits has been drastic with the majority having fled Kashmir within the first year of the conflict and relocating to Jammu and elsewhere. They are one of the most prominent internally displaced persons (IDPs)
in the region. Kashmiri Pandits are historically associated with state bureaucracies from the precolonial to postcolonial regimes and having been prominent landowners in Kashmir. While Kashmiri nationalism declares independence from the Indian state, the Pandits are located in the union between India and Kashmir. This book attempts to explore their experiences by looking at their relationship to Kashmir and the place they have relocated to, where they have rebuilt their lives. Focusing on ‘camp colonies’ and the lives of Pandits across the city, the book reveals a tension between the recovery of ordinary life after loss and the inability to feel truly settled and to finds one’s place in the world. This book explores how they seek recognition as victims through engagements with political parties, organizations, and organs of the Indian welfare state. But this process is caught in a struggle between the uniqueness of victimhood and the universality of violence and suffering. Thus, this book attempts to understand experiences of dispossession among people who occupy a politically ambivalent location.

Living in a Place of Exception
Ankur Datta

in On Uncertain Ground: Displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir

Published in print: 2016 Published Online: December 2016
Publisher: Oxford University Press
Item type: chapter

The forced migrant camp constitutes a significant component in imagining the experience of forced migration as a space of exception to normal life. This chapter explores camps established by the Indian state to accommodate homeless Kashmiri Pandits from 1990 until their closure in 2011. Since their establishment, the camps have evolved into thriving localities. Through close ethnographic attention to one camp, this chapter examines everyday life in that ‘place of exception’, while considering the spatial politics of the camp within the larger context of the cityscape of Jammu. The meanings of camps are refracted through the discourses and practices of state agents, political organizations, and differently-positioned residents. The chapter shows how camps seemingly transform from places of exception into sites of ordinary life. Yet, this transformation remains incomplete due to changing political contexts and their use in representing the interests of the migrants.
This chapter describes the historical and political milieu of Allahabad when the Nehru’s resided there. It looks at the founding of the Indian National Congress as well as the rise of the Kashmiri Pandits in Allahabad, which the Nehrus were a part of. Unlike some of the elite Muslim families that faded away, the Kashmiri Pandits had found their way into almost all vocations in life, and set great store by education and learning. The Nehrus were no different in this latter regard, particularly its patriarch, Motilal Nehru, whose life and character is described in more detail in the latter part of this chapter.

‘Thy Flag Will Be Laid in the Dust’

This chapter focuses on the imprisonment of Jawaharlal Nehru and other members of his family during the colonial period. It considers the composite identity of the Nehrus through their experiences in and outside of colonial jails. It explores whether Jawaharlal’s scepticism on religion and faith could have deepened as he moved from one prison to another, and what insights he would have gained from his historical explorations that resulted in the publication of several books. The chapter also examines what Jawaharlal made of the friendships in jails and discusses his ties with individuals like Mohamed Ali, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Sarojini Naidu, and Rabindranath Tagore, among others. Despite the discussion being centred on Motilal Nehru and Jawaharlal Nehru, the political fortunes of other members of the Nehru family are also looked at.