

Sir Reginald Coupland (1884–1952), Beit Professor of Colonial History at the University of Oxford, on Partition Issues (1943)

The Future of India. Report on the Constitutional Problem in India (3 vols., Oxford University Press, 1943).

...Partition, it is claimed, will solve the minority problem throughout India as nothing else can. It adopts the 'balance theory' in a form in which alone it can be valid. Moslem States are balanced against one or more Hindu States to which, whatever their size, they are equal in national status. There will be minorities in them all. It would be better, no doubt, if they could be communally homogeneous. **A wholesale exchange of population between the Moslem and Hindu States would be highly desirable if it were practicable, but, as will be explained later on, it is not. Some transfer, no doubt, would be possible. It is proposed, as will be seen, to separate certain predominantly Hindu districts from the Punjab and Bengal; and Hindus and Moslems living near but on the wrong side of any of the frontiers might be encouraged and assisted or even in the last resort compelled to migrate...**

Sir Reginald Coupland, *The future of India* (1943), volume 3, p. 46

Of the six million Sikhs in all India, 3.8 million are domiciled in the Punjab and 1.4 [million] in the Punjab States. This is only about 15 per cent of the aggregate population of the Province and the States, and there is not a single district of the Province in which the Sikhs are in a clear majority... the Sikhs are more concerned with their position in North-West India than in India as a whole, and it is the prospect of a Moslem, not of a Hindu Raj that alarms. Their reaction to Pakistan as conceived by the Moslem League is the exact counterpart of the Moslems' reaction to a union of India as conceived by the Congress... It seems probable, in fact, that rather allow themselves to become a minority in an independent Moslem State, the Sikhs would insist on their own right of self-determination... It would seem, therefore, to meet the needs of the case if the Province were divided into two roughly equal parts by a line drawn from north to south through the Central Division. But to determine exactly where that line should run is far from easy. The two principal cities of the Punjab - Lahore, the administrative capital, and Amritsar, the commercial capital and sacred city of the Sikhs - are both situated in the middle of the Province between the rivers Ravi and Beas and only thirty-five miles distant from each other... Between the two cities there is no natural dividing line of any kind. Any boundary set between them would be wholly artificial, geographically, ethnographically and economically... it would cut in two the system of canals on which the productive capacity of the whole area largely depends...

Ibid. iii. 84–86.

...the attitude of the Sikhs is a major obstacle to the realisation of Pakistan. That they could be coerced into it seems unthinkable. To attempt coercion would mean a civil war, and a war which, once it had broken out, could certainly not be confined to North–West India.

Ibid. iii. 87.

Just as the Sikhs are the crux of Pakistan, so Calcutta is the crux of North–East India... In both the city and in the district, the proportion is over two to one in favour of non–Moslems. And this balance is reflected in the city's cultural and commercial life... Communal discord has long been provoked by the fact that a Hindu–majority city is the capital of a Moslem–majority Province. Would it not be greatly aggravated and exacerbated if it became the capital of a Moslem state cut away from Western Bengal and the rest of Hindu India?... Yet, deprived of Calcutta, North–East India would become a rather dubious proposition. For economic reasons... it could not maintain itself as a separate independent state. It could only exist as a detached and backward Province of Pakistan, separated from it – since a corridor across the breadth of Hindu India is plainly impracticable – by more than 800 miles of land and air and more than 2,500 miles of sea.

Ibid. iii. 88–9.

If frontiers can be shifted, so, with more or less hardship, can people. The compulsory exchange of Greek and Turkish populations in 1923–4 under the auspices of the League of Nations has often been cited as an example of a method of dealing with a minority problem which, harsh as it is for the existing generation, offers a better prospect than any other method of peace and happiness in the future... But it must not be supposed that the minority–problem in India could be eased by this method to anything like the same extent as it might be eased in small European countries... a separate so complete is quite impossible. Numbers and distance alike forbid it. Mass–transfer would involve not hundreds of thousands but millions or tens of millions, and in many cases it would mean an unbearable change of climate and of all the ways of life which climate has dictated. Nor would it bring about in India, as it would in the Balkans, the union of homogeneous folk. The transferred multitudes would find themselves among people of a different stock, speaking a language they could not understand...

Ibid. iii. 89–90.

Coupland publishes a summary of the 1941 Census figures (see separate file: IndiaPop1941.pdf). See also the following notes.

Notes on Census Data of 1941

Source: Coupland iii. 185.

Figures are given in thousands.

- 1 The six states in the list are those with the largest population.
- 2 Kashmir: includes feudatories.
- 3 Muslims total India. The total population of India recorded by communities was 386,667,000. The remainder (2,331,000) consists of persons in the North West Agency and tribal areas beyond the administered border whose community could not be ascertained. The conditions of the region, however, indicate that they may be regarded as Muslims. If they are counted as Muslims, the total number of Muslims in India becomes 94,389,000.
- 4 Christians total India. The figures given for Christians in the census overlap with those given for tribes. Allowing for this, the total number of Christians is estimated at 7,250,000.