

Christian and Parsi

TO several generations of young boys and girls, in one of the largest Muslim countries of the world, good quality education

has been provided, to a large extent, by Christian and Parsi missionaries and philanthropists. The only exception is the Sindh Madrassah, which was established in 1885, and was a seat of learning for the Muslims of India.

The Christian and Parsi missionaries and philanthropists established state-of-the-art schools much before, some as much as between 100 and 150 years before Pakistan's independence in 1947. These schools, in most cases, have large custom-built buildings, with large airy classrooms, elaborate facilities for teaching of science, open areas and with proper and adequate playgrounds. These were set up both for the privileged, like Karachi Grammar School, St. Patrick's, St. Joseph's, Mama Parsi, BVS, as well as for the very poor. For example, today the Catholic Board in Karachi alone runs 18 English schools and 37 Urdu schools in various parts of the city, including Korangi Sector 3 1/2, Zia Colony, Baldia Town, Orangi and United Colony.

After the creation of Pakistan, a number of Pakistan philanthropists joined the educational crusade in providing education to children of privileged and not-so-privileged families. In Karachi, for example, prominent among such institutions are the Nasra School, Habib Public School, Habib Girls' School, Ghulam-i-Abbas, Al Murtaza schools, Shah Wilayat School, and many more. In the last few years The Citizens Foundation (TCF) has built modern

school buildings and has been running over a hundred schools in remote areas all over Pakistan for children from underprivileged and low-income backgrounds. By the end of this year, they hope to establish 20 more schools in custom-built facilities. In addition to these schools, there are scores of trust schools run by industrialists (usually near their factories and plants) throughout the country.

In order to appreciate the role of missionary schools, and to express our deep gratitude as a nation, one should look at what has happened to their standard before and since independence. It is also instructive to do this for state-run schools, which have been around before and after independence. In their case, the standard was considerably lower compared to that of the missionary-run schools, and it has continued to slide. However, missionary schools, to this day, maintain a very high standard and are among the best institutions we have. They provide good quality education to hundreds of thousands of boys and girls from all kinds of socio-economic backgrounds. Having said that, the contribution made by state-run schools cannot be underestimated. They are the largest providers of education in Pakistan, good or bad, in terms of the number of children who attend them. However, the role played by missionary schools was and has been critically invaluable from the perspective of the social, intellec-

tual as well as economic development, of this country. They have provided not just schooling but some excellent quality education to our young boys and girls over the years. Their standards have been such that they have, in fact, provided the yardstick for very good education. Even today, when there are more government schools and many private elite schools, the missionary schools continue to play the role of a mentor, as it were, for the education sector. Without these schools the state machinery, the industry and the private sector as a whole would have been hard-pressed to find human resources to run their own organizations.

In that sense, credit for much of the progress that we have made during the last 55 years should go to these missionary schools, and to those who run them, who have educated our grandparents, their parents, our parents, educated us and are now educating our children. Without these schools we would have been an intel-