

## **Adam's escape: Children and the discordant nature of colonial conversions**

Karen A. A. Vallgård  
*Childhood* 2011 18: 298  
DOI: 10.1177/0907568211407529

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<http://chd.sagepub.com/content/18/3/298>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:

Norwegian Centre for Child Research

**Additional services and information for *Childhood* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://chd.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://chd.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://chd.sagepub.com/content/18/3/298.refs.html>

>> **Version of Record** - Aug 23, 2011

[What is This?](#)



# Adam's escape: Children and the discordant nature of colonial conversions

Childhood  
18(3) 298–315  
© The Author(s) 2011  
Reprints and permission: sagepub.  
co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0907568211407529  
chd.sagepub.com  


**Karen A. A. Vallgård**

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

## Abstract

The article traces the fundamental incoherency that structured the Danish Missionary Society's work at a boarding school for low-caste 'heathen' children in South India in the 1860s and 1870s. Through elaborate disciplinary methods, the missionaries set out to Christianize and civilize the Indian children's morality, social behaviour and bodily comportment. Yet, the missionaries' perceptions of 'the Indian child' also reflected the contemporary bolstering of racial thinking in Indian colonial society, resulting in doubts whether Indian children could in fact become true Christians. This paradoxical endeavour shows how children became a site for the production of difference that sustained colonialism.

## Keywords

childhood, colonialism, gender, history, India, missionaries

Late at night on Saturday 12 March 1865, an Indian boy, who had been named Adam, sneaked out of the dorm where he was supposed to be sleeping at the boarding school run by the Danish Missionary Society. If any of the other boys noticed his whereabouts they didn't stop him from going, but neither did they follow him. He went out on his own.

The full moon cast its light on the buildings and the yard so he could easily find his way out of the compound and into the adjacent village of Pattambakkam (what is today Melpattambakkam). A loud rhythmic drumbeat mixed with screams and roars broke the usual silence of the night. It was the yearly full moon festival and in the village, everyone was out dancing, talking, and laughing. A comedy was being performed and Adam soon found a spot among the applauding spectators (Ochs, 1865b: 14).

Adam was one of about 40 children attending the boarding school in 1865.<sup>1</sup> The school had been founded a few years earlier by the German missionary Carl Ochs and was now part of the Danish Missionary Society's (DMS) first mission station, in Pattambakkam, South India.

---

## Corresponding author:

Karen A. A. Vallgård, SAXO Institute, History Section, University of Copenhagen, Fryensgade 8, 3th, DK-2200 Copenhagen, Denmark.

Email: karenva@hum.ku.dk

South India had long been a popular destination for Catholic and Protestant missionaries from many different European countries as well as from the US, and in the majority of these missions the education of native children was a central part of the missionary agenda. The DMS, the largest Danish society, was Lutheran, with most of its missionaries and leadership representing the Evangelical branch of the Danish church. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it established several mission stations, including medical missions, day schools, boarding schools, orphanages, industrial schools, etc. From the beginning of its engagement in South India, the education and upbringing of heathen children was also a high priority for the DMS. As Carl Ochs (1865a: 35) stressed in his motivation for running the boarding school, caring for heathen children was a Christian duty:

That we have mercy on the heathen children is the will and command of our Lord. He rejoiced when parents brought him their children; should we reject the ones the heathen bring us, just because their parents happen to be heathen?<sup>2</sup>

But the missionaries also had other motives in engaging with the children. Children caused fewer frustrations than their parents, who often defied and ridiculed missionaries as they preached on the streets. Given that the missionaries, unlike representatives of the colonial government, had no official power over Indians, such resistance could constitute a significant challenge to their endeavours (Pandian, 2007: 19–26). Moreover, the missionaries believed that children were more receptive to their proselytizing interventions and that they were crucial to the remaking of society. Carl Ochs (1870: 173) expressed this insight neatly in a language which also registered contemporaneous visions of civilization as tamed wilderness: ‘He who fights heathenism only in the hearts of the old, is like a man who seeks to wipe out a forest and cuts down the old trees, but lets the undergrowth stand.’

Like missionaries elsewhere, the Danish missionaries in South India were ‘conscious agents of cultural transformation’ (Janiewski, 1992: 169) who sought to fundamentally rearrange the social and moral order of South Indian society. Intervening in the processes through which Indian children acquired social knowledge constituted a central part of this project. ‘Total institutions’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 44) like the boarding school in Pattambakkam were an important tool in this endeavour. The missionaries removed the children from the ostensibly corrupting influence of the surrounding society, above all from their heathen homes and families, and enrolled them in a disciplinary programme designed to eliminate certain propensities, while nurturing others. Yet, as I argue, when considered in the light of their view of native children’s capacity for change, the substantial investments that the missionaries made in the children’s education appear somewhat paradoxical. While their efforts were directed at making the children into good and respectable Christians, the missionaries remained deeply ambivalent about the children’s capacity for the profound interior changes that would make them into such Christians.

This article explores the social microcosm of the boarding school in the years 1863–74 when Carl Ochs and his wife Sarah Ochs ran the school.<sup>3</sup> Using archival and published sources from the DMS, it traces the story of Adam and the structured

student life at the boarding school in Pattambakkam from which he escaped on that March night. How did the missionaries perceive the children, what did they consider to be an ideal Christian man or woman and what means did they employ to produce such individuals?

### **Fostering respectability: Eliminate and nourish**

We have no way of knowing how Adam might have felt, standing there in the cheering crowds; whether he was overwhelmed by the smell of incense and the loud, colourful celebrations, whether excitement was mixed with fear of being caught, or whether he felt somewhat like an outsider. Like most of the children Adam probably came from a low-caste or 'Pariah'<sup>4</sup> family in a nearby village. The process through which the missionaries obtained children from their non-Christian parents involved subtle coercion made possible by the economic impoverishment and social disadvantage of the latter (Vallgård, 2009). Once inside the school, the children were baptized and usually kept there till their 17th year.

Adam's decision to sneak out to the festival may have been an expression of longing for reunion with the world outside as well as mere curiosity. But it also could have signalled a desire to get away, even temporarily, from a disciplined, demanding and monotonous life at the boarding school.

The school had a detailed educative program designed to produce good Christian men and women. This schedule from 1865 was rather typical for the period investigated here:

Sunrise: Morning Prayer  
 Sunrise till 7: Work  
 7: Bath and breakfast  
 8–12: School with no break  
 12–2: Break with lunch at 1 o'clock  
 2–5: School for some of the children, work for the rest  
 5–7: Work  
 7: Dinner  
 7:30: Evening Prayer  
 7:30–9: Homework for the older children (Ochs, 1865a: 37).

Saturday afternoon and Sunday were their days off, although on Sundays everyone had to go to church and the older boys were required to reproduce the sermon in writing (Ochs, 1867a). Keeping the children occupied at the school minimized their interaction with local Indian society, making permanent the initial removal of the children from their parents and thereby reducing the risk of heathen influence. On the productive side, it implicated children in a temporal regime of discipline, teaching them punctuality, resilience and the capacity for hard work. By enrolling the children in such a dense and precisely structured schedule, the Danish missionaries also concurred with the norms in most other missionary and governmental institutions for children in colonial South Asia (Chatterjee, 1995; de Alwis, 1997; Haggis, 1998; Liebau, 2006; Sen, 2005).

While emphasis and pedagogical methods most likely differed according to the gender of the students, the school curriculum does not seem to have been gender specific. Unlike at government schools for elite Indian students, all classes at the boarding school, except for English-language classes, were taught in Tamil.<sup>5</sup> The children were given lessons in religion, catechism, biblical history of the Old and New Testaments, general history, Indian history, Tamil grammar, prose and poetry, arithmetic, geometry, geography, biology and English. They were taught to write essays and papers in Tamil and English, and they were sometimes given drawing and music lessons. The curriculum was composed of elements typical of European and particularly Christian education with an addition of certain elements. Carl Ochs commented that if missionary friends in Denmark considered certain educational elements superfluous – by which he probably referred to Tamil prose and poetry and music and drawing lessons – they should keep in mind that Christian children ought not appear inferior to the (elite) Hindus educated in government schools (Ochs, 1867c: 192).

As was common in many protestant mission schools, much of the funding for the school came from individuals or groups of donors in Denmark, Germany and other western countries, who ‘adopted’ an Indian child. In addition to the symbolically charged privilege of naming ‘their’ child,<sup>6</sup> typically with a European name, sponsors were rewarded with regular accounts of the child’s condition and progress. These reports give a sense of what the missionaries considered important in the comportment of the individual child:

Johannes Soranus has quickly learnt to read and has gifts for learning, only numbers cause him difficulties; he also memorizes well. His behaviour and character are good. His appearance is thickset and strong, he also works willingly.

and

Ebba Witthusen has few gifts for learning and is not particularly spiritually alive at all, but she is willing, behaves well, and works diligently; looking at her face, one can tell that she is somewhat mentally dull, her body lacks nothing. (Ochs, 1867c: 194–5)

Like these two examples, most of the brief progress reports measured the child against four different parameters: moral and spiritual state and conduct, abilities and achievements in school, willingness and capacity for labour and physical appearance and constitution. The missionaries aimed to properly form these components in the children according to principles of virtue and, at least as importantly, respectability.

Respectability, that is, the property that is the product of types of conduct and appearance which society considers decent and appropriate, is culturally specific and highly gendered. As I show later in the article, the notion of respectability that guided the missionary endeavours at Pattambakkam derived from western Evangelical middle-class culture, and while elements of it accorded with elite Indian ideals it was largely incompatible with the local converts’ social and economic possibilities.

The progress reports also indicate the productive ambitions of the missionaries. Although striking, the woodcutting metaphor, which Carl Ochs used to describe the work

with the heathen, is in fact somewhat misleading as an indicator of the missionary engagement with children. ‘Wiping out’ and ‘cutting down’ undesirable features in heathen children was a crucial element in the project of Christianizing them, but as I show in the following sections, this undoing was combined with efforts to cultivate particular sensibilities and characteristics in the minds and bodies of the children in their care. In carrying out this project, the missionaries availed themselves of a number of educational practices and modes of power.

## Elements of labour

Before and after school, Adam worked up to six hours every day. Along with the other boys, he was put to work in nearby gardens, in the paddy fields and on different local construction projects. In spending many hours at work, Adam was like most other working-class children in Europe and in India – and we have no reason to believe that he worked more at the boarding school than he would have done had he lived with his parents. Given their economic status it is likely that most families would have depended on the children contributing to the household economy, and the missionaries commented on local children herding cows, helping out in the fields, or minding their younger siblings (Ochs, 1865a: 35; Schlesch, 1891: 228).

Well into the 20th century, the average working-class child in Europe also worked several hours daily, but already in the late 19th century, ideals of childhood in which the child was separated from economic productivity had begun to emerge among the middle classes of the West (Fass, 2003; Zelizer, 1985). It is likely that many of the missionary friends, who supported the mission financially, would have shared these emerging ideals. Certainly, Carl Ochs seems to have been aware that making the children work long hours could offend his Danish supporters. He admitted (Ochs, 1867c: 193) that there was not a lot of time for play next to their work, but then defended the labour regimen, claiming that Indian children had no capacity for play.

However, in making the children work, the missionaries were motivated by other factors than simply keeping them occupied. Aside from keeping down the costs of running the boarding school, labour was considered to have an intrinsic value and it was viewed as serving particular educational purposes. Willingness and capacity for work was one of the key parameters that the missionaries took into account when they evaluated a child’s nature and progress. In the progress reports, industriousness figures as an end in and of itself – a quality to be nurtured and assessed. The missionaries also often expressed dismay at the laziness of the natives, thereby breathing air into a ubiquitous and often productive colonial stereotype (Andersen, 1875b; Andersen and Thomsen, 1866; Jensen, 1881).<sup>7</sup> Along the lines of Max Weber, Kavita Philip (2004: 154–5) has observed that in the late 19th century, European missionaries in South India regarded working for a reward a Christian virtue. Examining the religious and social significance of work in the missionary discourse and practice, she traces a ‘connection between work, morality, industrial production, and civilizational progress’. What Philip does not address is that labour was also a deeply gendered educational tool.

At the mission school in Pattambakkam the Indian boys and girls performed different types of labour, which cultivated gender-specific proficiencies and susceptibilities. The

academically strongest among the boys were trained to become catechists for the mission. But the mission could not employ all the young men who had been students in the school, nor did the missionaries believe that everyone was fit for that task (Ochs, 1865b). In 1865, Carl Ochs argued for the desirability of establishing an artisan school, in which the older boys could be taught a skill. In 1866 the missionaries hired an Indian carpenter to teach selected older boys carpentry (Ochs, 1866d) and in 1867 the Danish missionary N Hjorth arrived in Pattambakkam to establish an artisan school for the young men (Ochs, 1867b). By teaching the boys a skill, the missionaries did not just hope to make the boys economically independent, but also to assist them in social uplift, which would enable them to support a family and thereby become 'a respectable class of Christians' (Ochs, 1865b: 13). However, in this as in many other areas, the missionaries were disappointed with the children's ability and willingness to learn. According to Hjorth, the Indian boys were lazy and indifferent and even had the audacity to demand money for the work they performed. In fact they were so difficult that he soon lost interest in the work and asked to be relieved from his duty.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas for the boys the missionaries considered a respectable future to entail economic self-sufficiency, for the girls respectability included other elements. Sarah Ochs taught the female students various kinds of 'womanly work' (Ochs, 1865a). The girls usually spent most of the afternoon sewing and knitting on the verandah of the missionary bungalow (SH Ochs, 1868). In South India where most women and men dressed in unstitched saris and dhotis, respectively, knitting or sewing was neither typical female labour nor usually organized as domestic industry for working-class women to supply the household economy (Ochs, 1866a: 76). For the missionaries, however, needlework was a crucial symbol of female respectability and of womanhood defined by the domestic sphere. In keeping the girls occupied with it, the missionaries accorded with the practices of other missionary institutions in South Asia. In her study of boarding schools in colonial Sri Lanka, Malathi de Alwis (1997: 119) has, for example, compellingly argued that sewing was a central means of shaping the moral constitution of the female students because it was a form of labour that 'insisted upon neatness, orderliness, concentration, patience and precision'.

In addition to doing needlework, the girls would fetch water, clean and assist the school's cook, 'so that they also become familiar with this important part of Indian housekeeping' (Ochs, 1867c: 193), while helping to reduce the need for hired help. Female students also made fuel cakes out of cow dung, which, as Carl Ochs (1866d: 189) was careful to note, was a task any Indian woman did without thereby offending anyone. Girls were given training which enabled them to inhabit the domestic realm, the proper place for a woman in missionary ideology. The female students were given no vocational training and they were not taught to become workers for the mission. In the late 19th century, other European missions in South India used the boarding schools to prepare young women for work as Bible women, crucial to the *Zenana* missions, which aimed at proselytizing inside the women's quarters of Hindu homes (Haggis, 1998: 90). This was not practised in Pattambakkam. In fact, the missionaries did not encourage endeavours to educate Indian girls beyond normal schooling. Carl Ochs was deeply critical of the British educational reformer Mary Carpenter, also an Evangelical, who was establishing a teacher training college for Indian women in Madras. Carpenter would, Carl Ochs

believed, make ignorant Hindu girls into educated women who may well fit into a 'best room' but not in a household (Ochs and Schneider, 1869: 24).

Unlike missionary enterprises in some other parts of the world, these attempts at 'domesticating' Indian women were not foreign to all sectors of Indian society (Janiewski, 1992; Jensen, 1977). In fact, by teaching the girls in the boarding school domestic labour and no other skill, the DMS missionaries simultaneously accommodated western middle-class and upper-caste Indian notions of female respectability. Yet, they did not necessarily prepare the girls for the reality of most women's life at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the local South Indian society. Whereas the boys were taught a skill and thereby assisted in a social uplift, the girls were raised to become good housewives.

Many Europeans, including the Danish missionaries, perceived the upper-caste Indian gender order to be both oppressive and savage. Yet, the differences causing this 'gender frontier' (Brown, 1993) may have been more imagined than real. In the particular ideology of separate spheres and gendered labour distribution, as Eliza Kent (1999: 120) has shown, there was a convergence between western bourgeois and upper-caste Indian gender norms, as both held women to be naturally and ideally domestic beings. The *Purdah*, an elaborate set of practices which functioned to keep the sexes separate and women out of sight of the public (male) eye, was a defining feature of many upper-caste Indian women's lives. And in certain parts of Indian society, too, women were positioned as the moral (and spiritual) keepers of the home (Chatterjee, 1989, 1993).

However, in the boarding school at Pattambakkam, where the girls usually came from the underprivileged sections of the population, it is very likely that many of these young women would have to find paid work, helping to support their families. Thus, although compatible with elite Indian notions of respectability, the missionary family ideal, in which men were breadwinners and women were housewives, was at odds with local norms and possibilities. As Kent (1999: 120) has also noted, the ideal tying status to female domesticity was only possible to live up to within the middle and upper classes. The norm thus disparaged working-class women, who were required to contribute to the household economy and did not have the option of staying at home.

Since in the 1860s and 1870s the Danish missionaries did not teach the female students a skill, the girls would most likely have to perform unskilled labour as they grew up. However, while the missionaries did not seek to make the girls economically self-sufficient, they undoubtedly hoped for the girls' social status to be improved as a consequence of their future husbands' improved standing on the job market. The training of the boys was, in other words, the key to assisting both girls and boys in upward social mobility.

The marriage part itself was less alien to local society. By inducing the girls (as well as the boys) to envisage a future of married life, the missionaries could acknowledge codes of propriety in European as well as nearly all groups of Indian society. When girls were old enough to leave the school, the missionaries usually arranged a marriage for them, paid for a simple wedding and possibly gave them a small dowry, but expected them to find material support in their marriage (Ochs and Ochs, 1869).

Jane Haggis (1998: 87) has argued that missionaries in South India aimed not only to 'convert, educate or enlighten, but to impose/introduce a very specific set of gender roles and models belonging to Victorian middle-class culture'. This was largely true for Danish



missionaries, too, and as other 'gentle' modes of power, labour was an important means in this endeavour. But as this section has shown, even though the ideals that structured their efforts derived from a metropolitan middle-class Evangelical culture, and were incompatible with local low-caste living conditions, they were not irreconcilable with the gender codes of elite Hindu society.

## Inscribing their bodies

It was not just as a means of labour that Adam's body became a target for missionary intervention or an object of transformation. The children were to be healthy and physically robust; they were to embody a heightened morality and a virtuous lifestyle, thereby testifying to the superiority of Christian religion. In terms of diet and sleeping conditions, the children followed local Indian customs. They were given three meals a day, usually rice and a simple vegetable curry and, like their heathen counterparts, they slept on mats on the ground. The missionaries watched over the school children's physical well-being rather closely and at least once vaccinated all the children against small pox (Ochs, 1865c). Certainly, it seems to have troubled Carl Ochs personally when the children were sick or died.<sup>9</sup>

The appearance of both boys and girls was also important to the missionaries. When possible the boarding school students were dressed in identical uniforms. Uniforming the children was likely motivated by a wish to eliminate potential bodily signs of heathenism, but most of all to make the children look decent, and perhaps as belonging to an elevated social class.

In South Indian society, as in so many other societies, clothing and other bodily signs were highly symbolically charged. As Robert Hardgrave (1968) has shown, the decision of particular communities or castes to change their attire according to a higher status, thereby upsetting the social order, could result in violent controversies.<sup>10</sup> The missionaries in Pattambakkam were aware of the social and religious significance of visual bodily signs. In several instances, Carl Ochs intervened to abolish what he considered to be marks of heathenism in adult congregation members and in at least one instance, a congregation member's refusal to remove a heathen ornament resulted in his exclusion from the congregation (Ochs, 1866b: 255).

However, controlling children's appearance was foremost an effort to foster physical respectability. It bothered Carl Ochs that the missionaries often could not afford to buy the boarding school students proper clothing, as it made them look like their poor heathen children outside the school who also could not afford proper clothing. Conversely, when the students had been given new clothes, he was happy to show them to visitors (Ochs, 1867a).

Carl Ochs was especially concerned about the boys' bodily frames. In 1867, he wrote that 'the young ones' ought to be trained in gymnastics, 'so that they, in bodily respect too, could be superior to the heathen' (Ochs, 1867c: 193). By 'the young ones' he seems to have referred to the boys; certainly, when in 1869 the missionaries established a gymnasium at the school, it was for the boys only. Manliness involved a robust physique and although real masculinity was a white male prerogative, the missionaries aimed to make the Indian boys aspire to and strive for this. Moreover, in Carl Ochs' mind, the boys'

physical state was intimately bound up with their moral constitutions. He explained to the DMS that he had arranged the gymnasium 'in order to educate our boys physically too, and thereby give strength to their character.' (Ochs and Kalkar, 1869: 26).

Using labour, clothing and physical training, then, the missionaries sought to inscribe the children's bodies so that they would signal a specific social, moral and religious position, transforming the bodies of poor heathen children into those of hardworking, respectable Christian children.

## Corporal punishment

Adam's nocturnal excursion was a clear violation of the rules of the boarding school in Pattambakkam. This came to an abrupt end when some time in the early morning Carl Ochs found out that Adam was gone and immediately went looking for him.<sup>11</sup> They found him among the crowds in the village, brought him home and locked him up until the morning. Later, Carl Ochs (1865c: 68) assured the DMS board that the matter had been properly taken care of:

Since it was Sunday, he was brought into the church in front of the congregation and there he was reminded of how, in this place in front of God and the congregation he had promised to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways, and how he had nevertheless left in the middle of the night to mix with the heathen and watch their immoral and detestable performances.

From this description of the correction procedure to which the missionaries subjected Adam, one might think that the missionaries were disinclined to use corporal punishment and instead relied on gentler modes of discipline – something that has often been argued to be characteristic of missionary power in colonial contexts (de Alwis, 1997; Thomas, 1992). By placing him in front of the congregation and reminding him of his own promises, Carl Ochs sought to make Adam see himself through the gaze of others, to awaken the boy's own conscience, to induce shame and to appeal to his sense of moral and social responsibility. It was surely meant to be at least as productive as it was destructive. However, even though gentle forms of power prevailed at the boarding school, more authoritarian means of discipline were also in use at the school.

The sources do not reveal whether, in addition to the public, but physically gentle reproach, Adam's offence elicited corporal punishment, but it is not inconceivable that it did. Missionaries and teachers considered different types and degrees of violence to be necessary on some occasions in order to regulate, but also simply punish, the children's behaviour. Exactly how often corporal punishment was employed is somewhat unclear and different missionaries were more prone than others to administer corporal punishment. But in Carl Ochs' descriptions of school life, there are several examples of floggings and beatings of both girls and boys.

The types of offences and misdemeanours which could induce corporal punishment included running away from the school, stealing, lying and gossiping (Ochs, 1865c, 1867c). Carl Ochs sometimes combined different types of force as is evidenced by his complaint about children of nomadic, homeless people: 'I have had children of such people, and when love did not help, I have let them be guarded, bound, and locked up, but even this did not help' (Ochs and Kalkar, 1869: 27).

The missionaries would often make sure that corporal punishment did not pass unknown to the other children. For example, in the case of a boy who was physically penalized for having allegedly assisted two outsiders in a theft of sheep from a neighbour to the school, Carl Ochs (1867c: 197) noted, 'An example was made of him to serve as a warning.'

In the late 19th century, corporal punishment of children was still widely used both in India and the West, in many homes and in educational institutions. While the misdemeanours provoking punishment might have been different, it is not unlikely that the boarding school students would also have been subject to corporal punishment had they lived at home with their parents. Later, at least, when corporal punishment became less common in the missionary institutions, the missionaries often wrote of native violence towards children. Neither was corporal punishment an unusual phenomenon in institutions for children in late colonial India. Official colonial authorities also referred to physical measures in the punishment of juvenile delinquents. As Satadru Sen (2005: 90) has pointed out, contrary to what one might have expected, the use of supposedly pre-modern forms of physical punishment increased in the colony at the same time as the spread of modern infrastructure (see also Chatterjee, 1995: 39–40).

Nor was the use of corporal punishments in Pattambakkam alien to Danish practice. In Danish schools, such punishments were relatively common in the second half of the 19th century and continued to be so in many places into the 1950s. In 1860, the use of a cane was legalized; for older children floggings were permitted, and for the younger children, a rod could be used (de Coninck-Smith, 2000: 79–80). Nonetheless, the level and types of violence in Pattambakkam appear to have offended the sensibilities of some other missionaries and missionary friends in Denmark at the time. In a letter from 1869, the chair of the DMS, Dr Kalkar, mentioned that he had been told – probably by missionaries Niels Thomsen and Peter Andersen who arrived in Pattambakkam in 1865 – that Carl Ochs was sometimes too harsh with the children in the boarding school and he noted that his own accounts sometimes gave that impression, too (Kalkar, 1869).

While the DMS missionaries were not necessarily more prone to use corporal punishment than other Danish or colonial educators or the children's parents, the punishments exerted at the boarding school in Pattambakkam serve as a reminder that missionaries did not always stand for gentler forms of power, or in other words, that the 'gospel of gentility' was at times combined with brute forms of coercion.

## **Ambiguous natures**

Whatever the primary reason for Adam's nocturnal adventure, the missionaries may have interpreted the sinful act as a sign of the boy's irredeemably heathen nature.

Considering their substantial investments in the education of Indian children, one might be inclined to think that the DMS missionaries believed that nurture was more important than nature in the constitution of the individual or community. As Nicholas Thomas (1992) has argued, the Evangelical Christian faith in the possibility of conversion rendered missionaries more committed to a universalist ideology of a common humanity, where differences were not fixed, but could be overcome through the adoption by indigenous societies of Christianity and western civilization. In discourse, at least,

they were less preoccupied with essential racial differences than other colonial observers. However, Evangelical missionaries were not a uniform group. Reflecting and participating in its concrete context, missionary ideology varied between different groups of missionaries and from one place to another as well as over time.

The views of the DMS missionaries likewise reflected some of the discourses which prevailed in contemporary colonial India. In the years following the Indian Rebellion in 1857, the Anglicist ideals of rule and education gave way to a conviction that reform efforts were fruitless.<sup>12</sup> While such efforts were not altogether abandoned, in colonial discourses oppositional differences between Indians and Europeans were increasingly emphasized – a trend that was given force by the new developments in anthropological and biological theories of race – and British India became increasingly racially segregated (Bandyopadhyay, 2004: 65–76; Bayly, 1999: 126–38; Dirks, 2001: 130). As Satadru Sen (2005: 1) argues, this strengthened racial ideology also affected colonialist views of Indian children:

Even as some colonial observers ‘discovered’ the native child, the sites of discovery produced a widespread conviction that ‘native childhood’ was an oxymoron. Reformatories, boarding schools and authoritative texts were energized by the putative plasticity of the child, but they were also paralyzed by an articulation of difference that implied that native children were essentially small, perverse adults.<sup>13</sup>

A similar ambivalence structured the Danish missionaries’ perception of Indian children. Despite these missionaries’ commitment to transform South Indian society through the improvement of individuals, their discourse was marked by a semi-articulated belief that the very project was doomed in advance.

On the one hand, they believed that the children were in need of salvation from the corrupting influence of their heathen parents and native society as a whole. They were to be shaped as proper Christians and as models for their own society’s moral and civilizational uplift. This would seem to imply a belief that if differences had already been harnessed in children, they could at least be overcome with proper instruction. Indeed, the missionaries believed that certain undesirable elements in heathen children could be eradicated altogether. This was by and large true for what missionary Carl Ochs considered the three major vices in heathen children: their propensity for sinful sexual acts at an early age (a characteristic that he perceived to be especially salient in girls), their inclination to lie with great skill and audacity and their tendency to steal whenever they saw a chance to do so and without shame (Ochs, 1866c; Ochs and Ochs, 1869).<sup>14</sup> In that context Carl Ochs warned against admitting older children to the school, because by then they would be inculcated in the vices of their society (Ochs and Ochs, 1869). Still, while these vices were deeply entrenched in heathen children, they were learned and could therefore, at least in theory, be unlearned.

On the other hand, when describing the Christian children in the boarding school, the missionaries emphasized deep-seated differences between Indian and European children in ways that indicate a belief that they were both innate and permanent. According to the Danish missionaries, there were basic bodily dissimilarities between European and Indian children. Indian children, especially girls, were seen to become mature earlier than European children. Moreover, their views on the physical constitution of

Indian boys echoed a common colonial trope of the effeminacy of Indian men (Nandy, 1983; Sinha, 1995). Carl Ochs repeatedly described Indian boys as bodily weak and flaccid, but also as more flexible and supple than European boys. Although this weakness could be partially repaired through rigorous physical exercise, the strength of a European physique was ostensibly beyond reach of Hindus (Ochs and Kalkar, 1869; Ochs and Ochs, 1869).

The fundamental differences between European and Indian children were not just expressed in their bodily constitutions. Carl Ochs (1867b: 148) maintained that one feature, which distinguished Indian from European children was their almost perverse inability to play properly:

... they do not at all play like European children. When the boys play, there is normally some physical exercise connected to it, or they play to win something, to which they are very eager. Among the girls, the games do not go beyond imitating the few tasks of an Indian household, such as grinding rice and cooking, or beyond dancing, along with which they sing and clap their hands.

As mentioned above, the idea that Indian children were incapable of playing served to legitimate the placement of a heavy workload upon them. However, this was a time when 'unrestrained play' was gaining importance in western visions of childhood, and it is very likely that there were significant differences between the contemporary childhood cultures in this population in South India and the one Carl Ochs was familiar with in Europe (Chudacoff, 2007: 67–97). He did not appear to interpret the apparent inability to play as a cultural product, however, but rather as a characteristic that was innate. At least he made no effort to change it. He encouraged Danish missionary friends to refrain from sending toys to the Indian children, but instead to donate gifts that had some function, such as a comb or a pen. And since Indian children likewise had no sense of beauty, utility should weigh above all in the selection of gifts (Ochs, 1867b).

Beyond the capacity for play, differences between Indian and white children encompassed moral, social and intellectual features:

Between European and Hindu children there is a great difference; three of the former make more noise than twelve of the latter. The former learn more slowly and for a longer time and remember it better than the latter who mature early, learn easily, but soon cease to make progress and quickly forget. The former are usually straightforward, open, and free; the latter are delicate, conceal as much as possible, and do not easily achieve any level of independence. (Ochs and Ochs, 1869: 154)

These differences between European and Indian children were unmistakably gendered. Contrary to the European child, who possessed qualities usually valued in boys at the time (noisiness, intellectual superiority, independence), the Indian child was notoriously effete and characterized by traits believed to be typical of the female sex (early maturation, delicacy, deceptiveness, intellectual limitations) (Vallgård, 2005). The ostensible dishonesty of Indian children and the notion that they did 'not easily achieve any level of independence' also added to the image of Indian children as perhaps ultimately unable to develop the kind of religious conscience and character of which Europeans were capable.

In his descriptions of children, Carl Ochs like many other contemporary European observers, consistently conflated racial/national and religious classifications. As elsewhere, Carl Ochs here opposed 'Europeans' and 'Hindus', indicating that religious categorizations were inflected by ideas of race, culture and national character. The fact that Carl Ochs also referred to already baptized children as 'Hindu' further underscores the point.<sup>15</sup>

This apparently confused use of classifiers signals the fundamentally racial premise of the DMS missionaries' ideology. The missionaries in Pattambakkam in fact operated with an assumption that not only religion or upbringing, but also innate differences, were determining factors in the moral and social make-up of an individual or group of people. Indian children like Adam could at best become imitations; they could become 'almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha, 1997: 153). It is true, therefore, as Nick Dirks (2001: 147) has argued, that, 'in doubting the ultimate possibility of the conversion of native interiority into genuine Christian subjectivity, missionaries acted out the deepest contradictions of the colonial state'.

The identification of the racialized missionary perception of Indians might suggest that missionaries were, essentially, just another type of colonizer. Peter van der Veer (2001: 43) has, for example, argued that differences between missionaries and colonial officials are too often overstated. Agreeing that there were significant social differences between the two groups, he adds,

Nevertheless, their concerns colluded in the crucial fields of education and reform, as they did back home in Britain. The real difference was not between the colonial state and the missionaries but between the colonizing British and the colonized Indians.

I do not agree that privileging one fault line of power, as Van der Veer does here, between colonizer and colonized, is analytically fruitful. As has also been evident in this article, gender was another important mode of differentiation in late colonial India, and so were caste, class and age. Moreover, even if many contemporaries might have seen it as such, who belonged to which category was not a fixed or given fact. The education of children at the boarding school shows that it took much cultural labour to ensure the (re) production of such differences.

In many ways, certainly, the Danish missionaries were at odds with the British colonial state and disagreed with specific policies, not least on education, and as mentioned earlier, the missionaries' lack of formal power made it necessary for them to approach Indians in different ways than colonial officials might have done.<sup>16</sup> Yet, as I discuss in the following section, in distrusting Indians' ability to become true and respectable Christians, the missionaries not only reflected, but also contributed to a particular ideology of difference sustaining colonial rule.

## Necessary failures?

How are we to construe Adam's escape? Seen from one perspective, by running away from the boarding school, Adam embodied the failed missionary attempts to civilize and convert heathen children. Missionaries often expressed disappointment and were seldom

satisfied with the development of the children at the school, and this is not surprising. For in their cosmology, Adam and his peers would not be able to become like their European counterparts. The colonial thinking, which structured the missionary engagement with Indian children, also eventually prompted its failure. But this was a failure in part which added to the functioning of colonialism as a whole, because even as they were made into objects of transformation, the children were also caught in a formation of power that rendered necessary the continual reiteration of the fundamental difference between colonizer and colonized. The Danish mission in Pattambakkam therefore reproduced on a small scale, what Gyan Prakash (1999: 157) has characterized as the larger British project of fostering a modern India, inhabited by modern, self-disciplining individuals: a necessary failure.

Most of the time, the children at the boarding school did what the missionaries required of them; they studied, worked, ate, slept as they were supposed to and accepted the corporal punishment to which they were subjected when they slipped. Still, although they knew that it involved great risk, like Adam, many children ran away – or tried to run away – from the mission station.<sup>17</sup> Even when children complied with school regulations, but especially when they didn't, they were entangled in the production of colonial difference. By lying, stealing, refusing to participate and running away, in one sense the children merely acted out the roles to which they were cast by the colonial scene.

But this reading is not comprehensive. Not only does it render the colonial social formation suspiciously seamless, it also does disservice to the children who, like Adam, showed such resolve to defy the more immediate social constraint they faced. To represent their action as entirely determined by the social structures produced by colonial rule effaces their extraordinary insistence on seizing miniscule opportunities to assert themselves. Hence, although the only source we have to Adam's escape is produced by the missionaries, we must remain open to the possibility that Adam had motives that cannot be grasped fully within the truth regime of colonial discourses. To his own mind, he may not have been a failed Christian, but perhaps something else entirely.

## **Conclusion: A paradoxical enterprise**

What happened to Adam after the episode in March is a little unclear. He seems to have stayed at the school only for a short while after this. The last year that he figured on the lists of students at the school was 1866, but in 1871 and 1872 an Adam appears on the list of congregation members, so it is likely that he ended up staying in the congregation for a number of years. After Carl Ochs died in 1873 and the other missionaries left Pattambakkam, however, the congregation gradually dissolved and most of its members, including Adam, seem to have become reintegrated into the society outside the mission station (Andersen, 1875a: xxvii).

Following their Christian call, the DMS missionaries set out to rescue low-caste Indian children from what they perceived to be a miserable life, and to save 'their little souls' otherwise bound to be lost. The missionaries' educational project in Pattambakkam was one of consigning social knowledge. This meant to imprint on the children's bodies and cultivate in their minds ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling. The missionaries therefore laboured systematically to delegitimize what they considered heathen dispositions, instincts and expectations in the children and to replace them with proper Christian ones.

The methods ranged from formal schooling, gendered labour and physical exercise to a multitude of disciplinary practices and forms of punishments, all arranged in a minutely structured daily schedule. Yet, the racial ambivalence of missionary ideology carried the seed of the failure of their project.

This paradox is best understood as the result of what appears to have been mostly good missionary intentions and the specific colonial context within which these intentions were shaped and in which they informed proselytizing practices, namely the increasingly racialized British India of the late 19th century. The boarding school at Pattambakkam was one of the many places in which difference was harnessed not only between European and Indian, but also between heathen and Christian, child and adult and male and female, all made to fill out different positions in the colonial social hierarchies.

On one level, therefore, the frustrations of the missionaries in the work with the children were both necessary and productive of difference. On another level, however, the fissure opened a space where the children, through compliance or defiance, could ever so slightly alter the script of their futures.

## Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Notes

1. It has not been possible to ascertain Adam's exact age, but my best guess, based on the way in which Carl Ochs referred to him, would be that he was in his early teens in 1865.
2. All translations from the Danish are by the author.
3. It was founded by the Carl E Ochs in 1861 and from 1863 it was funded and officially administered by the DMS (Kalkar et al., 1873: 167).
4. Although the term appears to be an Anglicized version of the caste name Paraiyar, a social group found in much of South India, the Danish missionaries seem to have used it to refer more broadly to the so-called 'untouchables', or what we would today call Dalits.
5. In contemporary government schools, as Gauri Viswanathan (1989) has shown, the English language and the study of English literature were used as instruments in sustaining the colonial hegemony. This does not seem to have been the case in Pattambakkam. Heike Liebau (2006: 1207) has argued that the Protestant missionaries preferred to teach in the vernacular due to fear of Anglicization and in an attempt to distinguish their schools from the non-religious government schools.
6. For an interesting analysis of the power inherent in the privilege of naming, see McClintock (1995: 29).
7. The stereotype was not only prevalent in India, but also in many other colonies (Raibmon, 2006; Thomas, 1992).
8. Hjorth in a letter to the Danish mission board 7 July 1867 (DMS Archive, No. 10162-250, box 250, at the Danish National Archive).
9. Although it is hard to tell exactly how many school children died, from Carl Ochs' reports it seems that an average of one to two died every year (Ochs, 1864, 1866b, 1866c, 1867a, 1867c, 1868).



10. For a fascinating new reading of this controversy, which stresses the gendered aspect of caste, see Kent (2004: 199–234).
11. Ochs wrote that ‘we’ went looking for him – he may have been accompanied by a teacher or assistant or his wife or both.
12. The essence of the ‘Anglicist’ educational ideal was captured most succinctly by Thomas Macaulay (1835), who argued that the purpose of education in India was to foster ‘a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect’.
13. In a similar vein, Karen Sánchez-Eppler (1996: 409) has argued that with regard to American Christian perceptions of American children in the mid-19th century, one can detect, ‘an unstable double vision of children’s relation to religion, at once seeing the child as naturally depraved and as naturally angelic’.
14. Portraying Indian children’s immoral relationship to sexual matters, Carl Ochs wrote that their minds and hearts were poisoned at an early age so that they become familiar with things ‘about which, in other countries, adults would become red with shame’ and added that such sinful thoughts and speech also led to immoral acts (Ochs and Ochs, 1869: 146).
15. The somewhat oxymoronic concept of ‘Hindu Christian’ was frequently used, not only in the Danish missionary literature, but also British colonial and missionary discourse more generally. See e.g. Frykenberg (1993: 525).
16. For a discussion on differences between missionaries and the colonial state in India, see Frykenberg (2003).
17. One article, for example, reports four different children eloping or staying away from the school (Ochs, 1865c: 66–70).

## References

- Andersen P (1875a) Aarsberetning fra Siloam. *Dansk Missions-Blad, Tillægsblad* xvii–xxix.
- Andersen P (1875b) Beretning fra Hinduskolen i Trikalur. *Dansk Missions-Blad, Tillægsblad* xlix.
- Andersen P and Thomsen N (1866) Missionseleverne Andersens og Thomsens Rejse Fra England til Ostindien (sluttet). *Dansk Missions-Blad* 49–64.
- Bandyopadhyay S (2004) *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Bayly S (1999) *Caste, Society and Politics in Indian: From the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bhabha H (1997) Of mimicry and man: The ambivalence of colonial discourse. *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 152–162.
- Bourdieu P and Passeron J-C (1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Brown KM (1993) Brave new worlds: Women’s and gender history. *William and Mary Quarterly* 50(2): 311–328.
- Chatterjee G (1995) *Child Criminals and the Raj*. New Delhi: Akshaya Publications.
- Chatterjee P (1989) Colonialism, nationalism, and colonized women: The contest in India. *American Ethnologist* 16(4): 622–633.
- Chatterjee P (1993) *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chudacoff HP (2007) *Children at Play: An American History*. New York: New York University Press.

- De Alwis M (1997) The production and embodiment of respectability: Gendered demeanours in colonial Ceylon. *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited*. Colombo: Marga Institute, 105–144.
- De Coninck-Smith N (2000) *For barnets skyld. Byen, skolen og barndommen 1880–1914*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Dirks N (2001) *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fass PS (2003) Children and globalization. *Journal of Social History* 36(4): 963–977.
- Frykenberg RE (1993) Constructions of Hinduism at the nexus of history and religion. *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXIII(3): 523–550.
- Frykenberg RE (2003) Christians in India: An historical overview of their complex origins. *Christians and Missionaries in India: Cross-Cultural Communication since 1500*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 33–61.
- Haggis J (1998) ‘Good wives and mothers’ or ‘dedicated workers’? Contradictions of domesticity in the ‘mission of sisterhood’, Travancore, South India. In: Ram K and Jollu M (eds) *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 81–113.
- Hardgrave RL (1968) The breast-cloth controversy: Caste consciousness and social change in southern Travancore. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* V(2): 171–187.
- Janiewski D (1992) Learning to live ‘just like white folks’: Gender, ethnicity, and the state in the inland Northwest. In: Helly DO and Reverby SM (eds) *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women’s History*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 167–171.
- Jensen H (1881) Aarsberetning for 1880. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 84–96.
- Jensen J (1977) Native American women and agriculture: A Seneca case study. *Sex Roles* 3(5): 423–441.
- Kalkar CH (1869) Ostindien. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 68–70.
- Kalkar CH, Andersen P, Andersen S, Pedersen JA and Ochs CE (1873) Fra vore Missionærer i Indien (juni 1873). *Dansk Missions-Blad* 153–170.
- Kent EF (1999) Tamil Bible women and the Zenana missions of colonial South India. *History of Religions* 39(2): 117–149.
- Kent EF (2004) *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liebau H (2006) Faith and knowledge: The educational system of the Danish-Halle and English-Halle mission. In: Gross A, Kumaradoss YV and Liebau H (eds) *Halle and the Beginning of Protestant Christianity in India*, Vol. III. Halle: Verlag der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 1181–1214.
- Macaulay TB (1835) *Minute on Indian Education*. Available at: [www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html).
- McClintock A (1995) *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge.
- Nandy A (1983) *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ochs CE (1864) Brev fra Missionær Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 85–88.
- Ochs CE (1865a) Beretning fra Missionær Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 33–38.
- Ochs CE (1865b) Brev fra Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 11–14.
- Ochs CE (1865c) Breve fra Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 66–70.
- Ochs CE (1866a) Beretning fra Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 75–77.
- Ochs CE (1866b) Beretning fra Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 249–254.
- Ochs CE (1866c) Beretning fra Ochs (over det første Fjerdingaar af 1866). *Dansk Missions-Blad* 181–184.
- Ochs CE (1866d) Beretning fra Ochs (sluttet). *Dansk Missions-Blad* 185–190.

- Ochs CE (1867a) Beretning fra Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 57–65.
- Ochs CE (1867b) Beretning fra Ochs. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 145–150.
- Ochs CE (1867c) Beretning om Vaisenhuusskolen i Bethanien. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 189–197.
- Ochs CE (1868) Beretning fra Ochs 4de Kvartal 1867 (sluttet). *Dansk Missions-Blad* 49–51.
- Ochs CE (1870) Beretning om Vaisenhuusskolen i Bethanien. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 173–175.
- Ochs CE and Kalkar CH (1869) Beretning for første Fjerdingaar 1869. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 25–29.
- Ochs CE and Ochs SH (1869) Beretning fra Ochs angaaende Vaisenhuusskolen i Bethanien af 17de Juni 1869. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 145–155.
- Ochs CE and Schneider IG (1869) Beretning fra Grønland og fra Ostindien (Ochs). *Dansk Missions-Blad* 17–24.
- Ochs SH (1868) Brev fra Fru Ochs til Kvinde-Foreningen. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 226–227.
- Pandian MSS (2007) *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
- Philip K (2004) *Civilizing Measures: Race, Resources, and Modernity in Colonial India*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Prakash G (1999) *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Raibmon P (2006) The practices of everyday colonialism: Indigenous women at work in the hop fields and tourist industry of Puget Sound. *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3(3): 23–56.
- Sánchez-Eppler K (1996) Raising empires like children: Race, nation, and religious education. *American Literary History* 8(3): 399–425.
- Schlesch C (1891) Bethanien. *Dansk Missions-Blad* 225–292.
- Sen S (2005) *Colonial Childhoods: The Juvenile Periphery of India 1850–1945*. London: Anthem Press.
- Sinha M (1995) *Colonial Masculinity: The Effeminate Bengali and the Manly Englishman*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Thomas N (1992) Colonial conversions: Difference, hierarchy, and history in early twentieth-century Evangelical propaganda. *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 34(2): 366–389.
- Vallgård K (2005) På kanten af kønnet. Om Vilhelmine Møller og køn til forhandling. *Fortid og Nutid* No. 1: 3–24.
- Vallgård K (2009) Between consent and coercion: Danish missionaries and Tamil parents in late nineteenth century South India. *Review of Development and Social Change* XIV(1–2): 87–108.
- Van der Veer P (2001) *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Viswanathan G (1989) *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Zelizer VA (1985) *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children*. New York: Basic Books.