

**From temple tonsure to woman's wig:
Making Indian hair markets in the 1960s**

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Oh! mountain of gold, you are worshipped with great earnestness by all the devas from Brahma downwards. Holiest mountain, please excuse me, a great sinner, for treading upon you with my feet.

- A pilgrim to Tirumala Mountain, August 1964

About four hours inland from the city of Chennai lies a mountain, Tirumala. Each day, tens of thousands of pilgrims climb a winding road to the top. Some take a car or bus up the 12-mile ghat road; others spend hours hiking a seven-mile footpath that snakes up the mountain. Awaiting at the top is a bustling town, peopled by merchants and priests, attendants and barbers, and most of all fellow pilgrims – there to serve the Lord of the hill, Venkateswara. Also known as Balaji, Govinda, and Srinivasa, Venkateswara is an incarnation of Vishnu, the preserver.¹ They say that Venkateswara is a generous god; in this age of Kali, he has come to earth to grant boons to the pilgrims who visit his hilltop home, the Tirupati temple. But before entering the god's sight, many pilgrims stop first at an unassuming building that overlooks the temple complex: the Kalyanakatta, or tonsuring hall.

To visit the Kalyanakatta, you must remove your shoes. (Pay for a cubby, or simply add them to the pile by the bushes.) Then follow the queue into the building, and make sure to pick up your entrance ticket and a disposable razor blade. Keep walking until you enter a large room; just follow your ears toward the hubbub – the sounds of families talking, praying, celebrating. It's a joyous occasion, after all, the moment when you finally fulfill your vow to the Lord to surrender yourself by surrendering your hair. Watch your step! The tile floor is wet, and the room is crowded. When you have your bearings, use your ticket to locate the barber you've been assigned. Chances are your barber is quite busy; though hundreds of barbers serve the lord, the temple employs just enough of them at any time. (They have a saying here in the South: "like a Tirupati barber" – meaning that you "dabble in many things, but complete none," like the barbers who used to corner the tonsure market by shaving half a head and moving to the next before finishing, ensuring a tangle of angry, half-shorn pilgrims.²)

Take your haunches in front of the barber and offer your blade for her razor; it is time. (Since 2005, women have been barbers, too.) A last glance at the portrait of Venkateswara on the wall; a brief prayer; and it begins. Though she shaves swiftly and surely, your long, black hair is too valuable to waste. Unlike men's hair, which plops to the floor in wet clumps, your flowing tresses are gathered together and set aside. After a few long minutes, your tonsure is complete; your husband and children laugh to see your smooth head! Following a quick wash with disinfectant and a cooling

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¹ "Northerners flock to Tirupati to worship him as Balaji or Govinda, southerners worship him as Venkateswara or Srinivasa." C. Anna Rao, "Temple Funds and Social Progress," *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin*, Jan 1954, pp 8-12.

² M.W. Carr, *A Collection of Telugu Proverbs* (Madras: Christian Knowledge Society's Press, 1868), p 124.

balm of sandal paste, you head out the door and down to the temple; having surrendered your beauty, your body, your ego, you are finally ready to see Venkateswara.

Your hair, for its part, takes a different heading: into Tirupati's backrooms and godowns. There, it is dried, sorted, graded, and launched into the global market for human hair – passing through the hands of an Italian hair wholesaler, who sells high-quality hair extensions; or woven into a wig by a Chinese worker, to be sold to a Korean-American wig store owner, who finally helps the wig onto the head of an African-American wig wearer. Votive hair becomes purchased wig becomes once again an extension of the self – a neat transformation.³

It is a good story, so far as it goes. But in this paper, I want to use these strange commodities – human hair, and the wigs made from it – to tell an altogether more confusing story. In this paper, I argue that hair and wigs help to blur the bright boundaries between sacred and profane, between market and temple, between a commodity and its many overlapping lives.

Indeed, I suggest that it is impossible to forge a coherent commodity chain out of this fluid and turbulent commodity flow. Instead, I see a series of messy markets – overlapping and interacting markets, markets that are capacious enough to accommodate, and even nurture, the disorderly lives of objects. This model suggests that markets are not neatly bounded – that is, not restricted to a designated place or time, not necessarily sequential or chain-linked, and certainly not singular (“the market”). Instead, markets are open – that is, they are constantly (re)animated and (re)negotiated, and spill out across time and space. Markets are enacted not only whenever an object moves between people or places; or whenever an object transforms, taking on a new shape or purpose; but also whenever an object becomes *commensurable*, meaning not only that it is fungible but that it has actually become two things at once.

The magic of markets is that they produce sites of liminality, where objects take on multiple, simultaneous identities. In the historical market sites we will visit, hair was at once a body part, a religious offering, a worthless discard, a revenue source for temple administrators, a birthright for temple barbers, the raw material for a hairpiece, and a supplement to someone's sense of self. Moreover, hair never completed its transformation from one identity to another. Instead it multiplied, living a life haunted by shades of its former and future lives. When we peer in to look more closely at hair, our vision doubles and triples, blurring a simple commodity into something more complicated, messy, and meaningful.

But, ironically, to understand the messiness of hair and its markets, we must try to divide its fluid life into buckets – examining individual sites of exchange, transformation, and liminality in order to understand how each flowed into the others. So in the rest of this paper, I want to focus on the history of tonsure hair during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s – a time when Tirupati, and India, articulated the market for hair, and became entangled in the global market for hair and wigs.

Before we focus on Tirupati, however, it will help to have some broader background on the postwar era of wigs. Wigs became a global fashion fad in 1958, after French designer Hubert Givenchy featured them at a Paris fashion show; soon, wealthy Europeans and Americans, from Princess Grace to Jackie Kennedy, made wigs a wardrobe staple. These were high-cost, high-fashion items, often fabricated in France from European hair – and they were out of reach for any but the thickest pocketbooks. But by the early 1960s, wigs had become so popular that European sources began to run out of hair, even as middle-income women clamored for lower-priced wigs. To keep up with wider wig demand, wigmakers turned to Asian hair and Asian labor; and by 1965, most wigs were made in Hong Kong using communist Chinese hair. But at a time when the free world battled the communists in Vietnam, this growing trade in red hair caught the eye of American officials; and

³ Author's visit to Tirumala, Dec 2013; Rajiv Malik, “Seeking the Lord of the Seven Hills,” *Hinduism Today* (Jan-Mar 2006): 18.

thus, in December 1965, the US Treasury Department imposed an economic embargo against “Asiatic” hair, blocking the flow of wigs into the US, by far the world’s biggest wig buyer.

While the embargo aimed to prevent US currency from filling communist Chinese coffers, it also had the effect of turning the wig market on its head. The embargo forced #1 wigmaker Hong Kong to the sidelines, opening the door to South Korean wigmakers – who tapped an emergency reserve of anti-communist hair at home. By locating new sources of hair around Asia, however, Hong Kong quickly recovered its lead in the market; and by 1970, the wig market had become a billion-US dollar global business, as wigs became South Korea’s #2 export Hong Kong’s #4 export. These wigs were crafted from (non-aligned) hair from Indonesia and India; which sets the stage for our discussion about Tirupati tonsures in the 1950s-70s.

Hair as offering

Though temples across India have long traditions of tonsure, none have made tonsure as central as Tirupati.⁴ Perhaps the earliest foreign description of Tirupati – Portuguese writer Gaspar Correia’s 1580s account of Portuguese colonial adventurism, *Lendas da India* – features a lengthy section on what seems to be Tirupati’s brahmotsavam festival, a festival that, both then and today, witnesses the height of Tirupati visits and offerings. Correia claimed personally to have seen the festival, and depicted a stunning scene: three or four million visitors, including three or four hundred thousand on horse alone; “where one can find all the nations of people in the world, and as many goods as one can name from people’s mouths, in which I affirm that all the things in the world, nay in the universe, can be found, and of each thing as much as one is searching for.” (While Correia likely exaggerated these numbers, anyone who has visited Tirupati today can attest to the striking effect of its mingled festivity and commerce. As Tirupati’s promotional materials used to say: “Every day is a festival day at Tirupati.”⁵) But more germane for our purposes is his description of the tonsure, which pilgrims undertook as preparation for visiting the temple:

...the men shave their heads with a razor, leaving no more than a long, thin tuft of hair on the crown.... And since there are so many people, as I have said, there are enough barbers to suffice for them, who are all set apart below some large trees, and they shave one head for only one copper coin which is called *caixa*; and the amount of hair they amass is such that they fill up the space below the trees and on top of them. An amazing thing! There is a man who buys up this hair from the barbers, and they begin to buy when they begin to shave, and they pay a thousand *pardaos* and at times even more; the buyer then has this hair plaited and made into cords, gross and fine, and wigs for women, and other things, in which he makes much money, and all of it is sold there in the fair.⁶

Over the next centuries, foreign and Indian accounts of Tirupati that followed Correia’s frequently mentioned tonsure as a noteworthy and distinctive practice. Yet the practice of tonsure at Tirupati remains shrouded in mystery and miracle. No one, it seems, can be definitive about why tonsure became a common practice at the temple. Unlike other temple practices, tonsuring is not mentioned in any of the temple’s extensive wall inscriptions; and indeed today, it is described in

⁴ Other famous sites of temple tonsure include Annavaram, Chidambaram, Dwaraka Tirumala, Palani, Simhachalam, Srirangam, and Tiruttani.

⁵ Advertisement, “Abode of Sri Balaji Venkateswara,” *TTD Bulletin* (Oct 1962), p 496.

⁶ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbra Visions: Making Politics in Early Modern South India* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2001), p 41.

official temple publications as a tradition rather than a requirement. (While thousands pilgrims have been tonsured each day since at least the 1960s, a majority are not; one 1964 estimate suggested that one in five visitors received tonsure.)⁷ One history of the temple suggests that tonsure was originally taken up as a source of revenue for the temple; or that tonsure was popularized as a recruitment tool for proselytizing prospective Vaishnavites.⁸ A revisionist history of Tirupati likewise wonders whether tonsure had its roots in Buddhist practices of head-shaving. For me, the most convincing suggestion is that tonsures have at times been prescribed as an act appropriate for the start or culmination of a pilgrimage.⁹ And here, we may want to note that so far as Tirupati is concerned, we are most interested in a specific type of tonsure: the tonsure that was undertaken as part of a pilgrimage, in contrast to the tonsure that was prescribed within the first years after a baby was born or the tonsure after the death of a spouse or parent. While these birth and death tonsures enter our story, too, Tirupati tonsures were distinctive for focusing on the pilgrimage.

Moreover, the Tirupati tonsure was distinctive in its focus on tonsure as an *exchange* with Lord Venkateswara. Temple officials, government publications, and pilgrims alike described this exchange as the fulfillment of vows made by a pilgrim to Venkateswara.¹⁰ More than that, they were vows made either in the hopes of receiving a future boon from the god, or in thanks for a boon already received. “Most people take vows – some of them very peculiar too – when they are in distress or when they have achieved some success,” wrote a reporter in Bangalore’s *Spectator*. “It is just an expression of sacrifice or gratitude to God.”¹¹ Venkateswara was known as the god who might grant almost any boon, no matter how great or trivial. Even his name was said to be suffused with wealth: one devotee claimed that Venkateswara’s initial “V” was “a seed of nectar” while the “Kata” meant “wealth.”¹² Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, temple officials frequently published accounts by pilgrims of vows forsaken and fulfilled in the *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin*, a magazine mailed to devoted subscribers to demonstrate the value of a visit to Tirupati and darshan before the god.

The October 1956 issue, for instance, featured the story of Raghunandan Bishoyi of Orissa province. For 10 years, “by day and night,” Bishoyi had prayed for a son. At the suggestion of a friend, he finally visited Tirupati in 1954, taking the comfortable temple-provided bus up the hill and meeting a temple-provided guide when he arrived at the top. He stayed overnight in a free inn, subsidized by temple funds, and took darshan in front of the black statue of Venkateswara in the inner sanctum of the temple. And as he stood before the four-armed deity, who was bedecked in jewels and gold, anointed in sandal paste and camphor, “I stood there for some time with emotions tears in eyes (sic) and praised the Lord in Sanskrit hymns and *then a bhab came to my mind that my long cherished desire will be fulfilled, due to this sacred Darshan.*” Less than a year later – as Bishoyi’s friend had predicted – the 48-year-old penitent welcomed a son, Brajamohan; in thanks, his father fastened a silver ring around the son’s right leg. The ring was a symbol of Venkateswara, but also a promise to

⁷ Our Madras Correspondent, “Indian Hilltop Shrine Still Draws 10,000 People a Day,” *The Times [of London]* 12 Dec 1964. In the article, the author estimates that of 10,000 visitors per day, 2,000 were tonsured. This article was reprinted in the temple journal of March 1965 (pp 31-32), suggesting that *Times* estimates were unobjectionable to temple officials.

⁸ Pidatala Sitapati, *Sri Venkateswara: Lord of the Seven Hills, Tirupati* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1972), pp 154-55.

⁹ K. Jamanadas, *Tirupati Balaji was a Buddhist Shrine* (Chandrapur: Sanjivan Publications, 1991), pp 149-59. For the Sanskrit roots of the tonsure tradition, also see Benjamin J. Fleming, “From Tirupati to Brooklyn: Interpreting Hindu Votive Hair-Offerings,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40, No. 2 (2011), pp 206-10; and D. Satyanarayana, “Kesakhandana,” *SVU Oriental Journal*, Vol XXXII-XXXIV (1989-91), pp 141-60.

¹⁰ *Census of India, 1961*, v2 pt 7B, no 8, p 93; C. Anna Rao, “Administration of Religious Funds for Welfare Services,” *TTD Bulletin*, April 1964, XV:4, pp 13-14.

¹¹ V.R. Ruthnam, “Vows Help To Build A Varsity,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (reprint of article in *The Spectator, Bangalore*), (Sep 1957), pp 5-15.

¹² M. Rama Rao, “The Glory of Venkatdri and Venkatesa,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams’ Journal* (Apr 1969), pp 39-43.

return with the family to Tirupati before the child's third birthday, to offer thanks for a gift granted.¹³

Students prayed to Venkateswara for success on their tests; businesspeople prayed for profits; "To crores of people who are helpless, the Lord is the prop; to millions who are sick, his name is the medicine and to legions who are cowed down by darkness of trouble and turmoils, the Lord is the light. People have immense faith in the power of the Lord who heals their wounds of sorrows, protects them from calamities and dangers, bestows them longer life and health, prosperity, wealth, education and what not!"¹⁴ But woe to the pilgrim who reneged on her vow. A 1954 article reported the case of a woman whose two sons had been shot, and lay dying. In desperation, she prayed to Venkateswara, vowing her entire collection of jewels if he saved her sons. When her sons recovered, the woman trekked to Tirupati, but instead of offering the jewels she offered a check for their equivalent, Rs. 1,116. "On return the lady lost her mental balance and the husband was awe-stricken," the *Bulletin* reported, until the husband returned to offer the jewels at Tirupati.¹⁵ Likewise a "young man" who was tormented by an abscess on his finger, and pledged to offer Venkateswara the diamond ring off that finger if he was healed. After the healing, he decided to keep the ring and offer its cash equivalent instead – but as he tipped the cash into the hundi, or offering urn, in Venkateswara's temple, "the ring on his finger also slipped off and fell with a tinkle to the bottom." As the *Bulletin* author warned, "You can perhaps evade the income-tax authorities or the decrees of a civil court; but should you even think of evading your promise to Lord Venkateswara, he is liable to exact his due with penalty."¹⁶

As millions of pilgrims made vows to Venkateswara during the 1950s and 1960s, many fulfilled them by offering their most valuable possessions at Tirupati. The temple received these offerings in an eight-foot high brass donation urn, positioned just inside gate of the Tirumamani mantapam – a space that offered the devotee's first view of the black statue of Venkateswara, just outside the gold-plated gate.¹⁷ This brass receptacle was called a hundi, and its name and shape seem to have been unusual. When Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Tirupati in 1958, for instance, the temple *Bulletin* noted that officials took pains to explain the hundi to him.¹⁸ The term seems to have been borrowed from Indian finance, where it originally referred to a financial network that allowed people to use money across gaps of distance or time (borrowing money in one place and repaying it in another, or paying money down in one place and withdrawing it in another) – though it also referred to the promissory notes and receipts that enabled the network.¹⁹ By the early 20th century, it is possible to find reference to hundis as donation boxes more generally, perhaps connecting the idea of the hundi network with the idea of pledging money at a distance from the intended recipient (as when devotees made offerings to a god at a distance from the god's presence);

¹³ Raghunandan Bishoyi, "Sri Venkateswara Balaji Fulfills the Heart's Desire," *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (Oct 1956): pp 11-13. Italics in original.

¹⁴ Sr. S.V. Ramayya, "Glory of Lord Sri Venkateswara," *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams' Journal* (Sep 1968), pp 5-8.

¹⁵ "News for April, 1954," *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (May 1954), p 6.

¹⁶ Unauthored and untitled article, *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (Dec 1956), p 16.

¹⁷ A. Jayaram Naidu, *Tirupati: A Guide for the Pilgrimage to Tirumalai, Sree Venkateswara* (Tirupati: T.T. Devasthanams Press, 1948), p 17, which refers to this area as the "Tirumuhamanimandapa or Rangamandapa," and notes that it was "completely enclosed on all sides by iron bars and the office of the Parpatyadar...and the God's Hundi are situated in it"; Sitapati, *Sri Venkateswara*, p 151 and map (appendix); http://www.tirumala.org/maintemple_tour_tirumamani.htm, accessed 1 Jun 2014.

¹⁸ "Shri Jawaharlal Nehru worshipped Sri Venkateswara at Tirumala, Laid the Foundation for The University College of Engineering; Opened The buildings of the Nat. & Phy. science Labs; and Inaugurated Sri Venkateswara College of Music & Dance," *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams' Bulletin* (Nov 1959, Sri Nehru Supplement), p 93.

¹⁹ Marina Martin, "An Economic History of Hundi, 1858-1978," PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, Jan 2012.

and it seems likely that Tirupati tradition applied this last definition to its most prominent donation urn.²⁰

Pilgrims approached the hundi with valuables in hand; on reaching the urn, they often wrapped their offerings in a piece of fabric before reaching up to drop their bundle in, through the opening.²¹ Some devotees who could not make it to Tirupati might send their donations with relatives, or, at least until the early 20th century, sent them with ghoseyns, couriers who were known as a reliable channel for taking one's donation to the temple. Other households kept a small hundi at home, and when chance and finances combined to allow a pilgrimage, carried the contents to the temple. When I visited Tirumala, my driver, a Tamil local, told me that he had not visited Tirupati as a pilgrim for several years because he was working to accumulate enough money to pay off the "debt" he owed to Venkateswara – in return for the good fortune the god had facilitated. His good luck corresponded to a specific target (Rs. 50,000, plus a gold necklace that was typically given to Venkateswara by newlyweds), and he had decided not to take darshan until he could bring his offering in full.

On entering the temple and reaching the hundi, pilgrims often would wrap their valuables in a cloth before dropping them in through a high opening in the urn. Each day, temple officials would conduct the parakamani, a count of these offerings in front of witnesses. The temple's *Bulletin* regularly advertised the timing of the parakamani ("usually at the time of Dharma Darshan" – about 1 pm) and invited pilgrims to witness the counting. This transparency was a key part of the ceremony: many temples, including Tirupati, had a reputation for "defalcation," as one worshipper put it, and the parakamani helped make visible the transfer of offerings from pilgrim to god.²²

Pilgrims commonly wrapped up gold, silver, jewels and jewelry, and coins and notes in their bundles – offerings that were critical to the temple's finances.²³ But other offerings were common, too. Pilgrims who had been injured might bring a miniature of the injured body part cast in a precious metal – a silver eye or a gold nose.²⁴ Even when gold was offered in lump or coin form, however, the gold might be connected with a body part. For instance, when babies and children were brought to the temple for a first blessing, some were weighed so that wealthy parents might offer the child's weight in gold.²⁵ (In 1965, the temple inverted this practice when the Indian

²⁰ In Madras, "Hundi boxes were taken among the audience by volunteers and subscriptions in the shape of cash ornaments and valuable cloths were collected." In "Contribution from Madras," *The Leader [Allahabad]*, 2 Jul 1921.

²¹ T. Varadachary, *Tirumala – The Panorama of Seven Hills: A Pilgrim's Guide to Tirumala* (Tirupati, India: The Executive Officer, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1999), p 25.

²² C. Anna Rao, "A Request," *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (Jan 1954): p 2; *Census of India, 1961*, v2 pt 7B, no 8, pp 92-93; Ayilam Subrahmanya Panchapagesa Aiyar, *Twenty-Five Years a Civilian* (Madras: V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, 1962), p 72.

²³ *Census of India, 1961*, v2 pt 7B, no 8, p 92. In 1831, a British official described a hundi offering process that sounds very similar to the process of the 1950s and 1960s: "These offerings, or caunickee, are made generally from interested motives, and are of every diversity of articles conceivable; gold and silver lumps, coins of all sorts, bags of rupees, copper money, spices, assafoetida, the hair cut off the head, frequently vowed from infancy, and given up by some beautiful virgin in compliance with her parent's oath. A man who is lame presents a silver leg; if blind, a silver or gold eye; in fact, there would be no end were I to enumerate the various ways in which Hindoo superstition develops itself on this occasion. The jewels, which a woman has worn with pride from infancy, are voluntarily left before the idol; she appears with a shabby cloth before the stone god, and presents a splendid one, which has never been worn; she tears the bangles from her infant's little legs, and fondly hopes that the god, whom she *Sees in the clouds and hears in the wind*, will shower his blessings on her and hers." Italics in original. "The Pagoda of Tripetty," *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia* Vol 5, No 19 (May-Aug 1831), p194.

²⁴ "Pilgrimage to Tirupati: Provision of Facilities," *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams' Bulletin* [reprinted from the *Hindu* newspaper], Oct 1958, pp 25-27; *Census of India, 1961*, v2 pt 7B, no 8, pp 60-61, also documents this practice at Lord Gundala Mallikharjuna Swamy Temple in Talupula.

²⁵ Sri Venkateswara Recording Project, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, "Tirupati Tirthayatra," (1977), accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i62SoGBTK6c>.

government asked the temple to help ease a currency crisis, and the temple responded by converting the weight of the Indian Prime Minister into gold and investing that figure in gold bonds.)²⁶

Sometimes, pilgrims also offered items that were intended for the use of the god – necklaces or scarves to adorn his statue, for instance, not to mention food offerings.²⁷ The temple rule for such offerings was that the donor was required to give not only the item but also its equivalent in gold or cash. Pilgrims were urged to ask for a receipt for any valuable donations, and were assured that the hundi's keeper, the Parpatyadar, would gladly provide one.²⁸ In fact, an in-house advertisement that ran frequently in the temple magazine listed several key “hints for pilgrims,” and among them was the following: “deposit all your offerings in the hundis kept in all temples or give them in temple offices and obtain printed receipts. Otherwise you will not fulfill your vows.” This helpful advice thus was also a description of a formalized transaction: paralleling the hundi financial network, the promissory note of a vow to Venkateswara required, in turn, a payoff to the hundi, or else the vow would be in default.²⁹ Another useful piece of advice from 1964, which suggested the diversity of hundi offerings: “Pilgrims are advised that combustible and easily inflammable materials are not to be dropped in the sacred Hundi of Sri Venkateshwaraswamy at Tirumala.”³⁰

And then there was hair. “The layman does not know the mystic or esoteric explanations for the offering of hair to deities,” wrote an author in the temple *Bulletin* in 1957, “but by custom and tradition the practice has been handed down from one generation to another.”³¹ Because Tirupati hair offering was custom rather than rule, tonsure seemed to happen in many ways, and for many reasons. In other words, there was no set ritual or rule for the tonsure, which means that those who suggest they know exactly what pilgrims meant by the tonsure are oversimplifying. Some pilgrims seem to have thought of the tonsure as part of the process of purification – a process often combined with a cleansing in one of Tirupati's many holy water sources. Thus, even today, many pilgrims proceed directly from the Kalyanakatta, or tonsuring hall, to bathe in the Pushkarini (one of India's holiest pools – indeed, the source of the water that purified Rama before he fought Ravana, as well as the water in which the Ganges washed to purify herself), and only then feel sufficiently purified to enter the queue for darshan.³² This interpretation dovetails with the idea that hair which is no longer attached to the body is polluted.

Many accounts of the tonsure use the language of “surrender” and “sacrifice” to describe why pilgrims offer their hair. Thus, a 1913 guide to Tirupati describes tonsure prosaically, as “a sort of sacrifice of personal beauty.” The 1981 Andhra Pradesh *Census* describes a similar sacrifice, but amplifies that it is not simply the sacrifice of beauty but a more significant “surrender,” an “offering of their ego (Aham),” meaning that to shave one's head is “to cast away the narrow individuality and

²⁶ “News & Notes,” *TTD Bulletin* (Nov 1965), p 37. A variation on the symbolic offering reveals a different interpretation of the tonsure's value: some women who underwent tonsure decided not to shave completely, and instead offered a small measure of hair. A 1961 *Census* account, for instance, describes “3 scissors of hair” as a suitable offering. (I saw similar symbolic offerings, all by women, when I visited Tirupati's main Kalyanakatta in December 2013.) This adds another kink in the translation of hair: for this “3 scissors” offering sacrificed neither beauty nor did it offer any significant financial value to the god. Instead, it seems to suggest that even the *idea* of hair offering was itself valuable in fulfilling a vow to Venkateswara, perhaps in that it allowed a pilgrim to meet the expectation of participating in the long-running practice. It is certainly a sign of how the tonsure was open to a wide variety of interpretations, enabling a wide range of acceptable methods of adherence. *Census of India, 1961*, Vol 2, Part 7B, No 8, pp 93.

²⁷ Food was offered to the god, blessed, and then distributed to hereditary temple officials and pilgrims.

²⁸ Naidu, *Tirupati*, p 24.

²⁹ “Hints to Pilgrims,” *TTD Bulletin* (April 1963), p 184.

³⁰ “Press Note,” *TTD Bulletin* (Oct 1964), p 39.

³¹ V.R. Ruthnam, “Vows Help To Build A 'Varsity,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (reprint of article in *The Spectator, Bangalore*) (Sep 1957), pp 5-15.

³² T.K. Gopalaswami Aiyangar, “The Sacred Names of Lord Srinivasa,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (Sep 1957), pp 35-39; Narayana Rau, *The Tirupathi Temple: Its History: Past and Present* (Cocanada: 1913), p 4.

integrate themselves with Him. It is complete surrender of one to all or leaving everything to the will of God.” The *Census* compares the offering of hair to the offering of material wealth, and concludes that this “complete surrender...is more valuable to God than all the riches of the richest.”³³

A certain P.J. Achari wrote in 1967 about his pilgrimage to Tirupati, and noted that he took darshan but did not tonsure in his first two days at the hilltop. But then, on the third day, he changed his mind, writing that

my mind was reeling. I find people coming and clean shaving their heads thus expressing internally and externally their complete surrender to Him, the inner thoughts in me goaded me to shave my head also even though there is no vow to fulfill on the third day if I remember correct. I fulfilled my desire and immediately I felt that light heartedness. May be it is a superstition but that is it and that is what has happened.³⁴

Here, Achari interpreted the tonsure as an outward sign of an inward surrender – so that the tonsure’s physical aspect was connected to its mental and emotional ones. Moreover, Achari had not expected to offer his hair; there was never a promissory vow to be repaid. Indeed, Achari even suggested that tonsure might simply be a “superstition” – something that is not part of a formal darshan – yet admitted that he felt better afterward, whatever the reason. Another pilgrim, S. Raghavendra Rao, suggested that this kind of haziness around the precise motives for sacrifice was to be expected:

To the casual observer whose mind is caught in modern thinking it looks quite ludicrous why people in stupid faith throng the place with rich offerings for the so-called fulfillment of their desires. But it is not the fulfillment of desires but the awakening of the latent spirit to penetrate, steer and clear of the mysteries that surround the Universe that draws so many to Lord Venkateswara. Most of the pilgrims like the casual observer may not be fully and clearly conscious of this awakening. They are an innocent lot and they pray in sincerity. But their sincere (sic) prayers are based on this fundamental truth.³⁵

In Rao’s interpretation, pilgrims don’t even have to understand why they surrender; but the surrender nevertheless helps them to share the god’s immanence.

In addition to purification, sacrifice, surrender, and a straightforward adherence to tradition, we can add a final motivation: fulfillment of a vow to the god. That is how C. Anna Rao, Executive Officer of the temple board, described shaving – as “tonsure...in fulfillment of vows.”³⁶ Here, we return to the idea of a divine ledger: in which a debt was incurred to Venkateswara in return for a past or future boon, and the debt was first balanced by a vow and then repaid by an offering. In many cases, as we have seen, penitents met their debt with a contribution in cash or patently valuable goods, such as gold or jewels. But pilgrims also placed a strange sort of valuable in the hundi: their hair.

³³ Rau, *The Tirupathi Temple: Its History: Past and Present*, p 16; Ch. Purnachandra Rao, ed., *Census of India, 1981, Andhra Pradesh: A Monograph on Tirupati-Tirumala (Chittoor District)*, Series 2, Part X-B (Delhi: Government of India Publications, 1984), Appendix I, p 245.

³⁴ P.J. Achari, “The Seven Hills and the Lord,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams’ Journal* (Dec 1967), pp 7-8. Sic.

³⁵ S. Raghavendra Rao, “Reflections of a Pilgrim,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams’ Journal* (Apr 1969), p 16.

³⁶ C. Anna Rao, “Administration of Religious Funds for Welfare Services,” in India International Centre, *Proceedings of the Seminar on Social Administration in Developing Countries, March 16-21, 1964* (New Delhi: India International Centre [1964]), p106.

I first came across mention of hair being placed in the hundi in a *Times of London* article that was reprinted in the 1965 temple magazine, thus lending the temple's imprimatur. The reporter wrote that pilgrims threw into the hundi "money, cheques, jewellery, tonsures hair, vegetables, or anything else they wish." What's more, the reporter suggested that pilgrims offered not only hair itself but also "its equivalent weight in gold or other precious metal."³⁷ This recalls the gold and silver limbs and organs offered to Venkateswara, which in turn underscores how the depth of sacred sacrifice could be pegged plainly to financial value. But more than that, it emphasizes that votive hair was, in the minds of at least some pilgrims, already being translated into its equivalent in gold, with equivalence defined a physical, embodied standard: the weight of human hair. And what's more, thinking of the temple custom in which offerings to Venkateswara of food and clothing had to be accompanied by their equivalent in cash, we can see that the body could also be valued and monetized – and possibly that there is some kind of essential equivalency between hair and gold.

I came across other mentions as well: in a 1962 autobiography by a former Indian civil servant, in which he recalled that Tirupati hundi offerings included "gold ornaments or coins or currency notes, and some women used to put their long hair also as a votive offering for curing the diseases of their husbands."³⁸ Likewise a 1999 temple-published book on Tirumala, which noted that hundi offerings "range from hairs removed from the shaven heads of men and women to diamond jewellery, ornamental necklaces, ear rings, gold bangles set with precious stones, bundles of currency notes, gold, silver, jiggery, sugar candy, idols, vessels, wrist watches, promisory notes, lottery tickets and other articles, and coins of all denominations current and old."³⁹ A 2009 temple document describes how to handle hair that is deposited in the hundi;⁴⁰ while as far back as 1831, an account of Tirupati by a British official notes that hundi offerings included "gold and silver lumps, coins of all sorts, bags of rupees, copper money, spices, assafoetida, the hair cut off the head, frequently vowed from infancy, and given up by some beautiful virgin in compliance with her parent's oath."⁴¹ Here we can see another strange feature of an oath to Venkateswara: a pledge of hair could extend across time and generations, with children owing hair promised by their parents.

One reason for belaboring this evidence is to balance the suggestion of religion scholar Diana Eck, who writes in her 2012 monograph, *India: A Sacred Geography*, that "hair is not offered in the temple or ever presented in the temple, since hair cuttings would be considered a form of pollution in the sacred precincts. The hair is not offered to the Lord at all, but the person who has submitted to tonsure presents himself or herself before the Lord in the temple."⁴² While there are certainly many examples of hair being treated as pollution, the practice of placing hair in the *hundi* suggests that tonsured hair carried diverse meanings and values, and that the practice of hair offering was open to many interpretations.⁴³

³⁷ Our Madras Correspondent, "Indian Hilltop Shrine Still Draws 10,000 People a Day," *The Times [of London]*, 12 Dec 1964.

³⁸ Ayilam Subrahmanya Panchapagesa Aiyar, *Twenty-Five Years a Civilian* (Madras: V. Ramaswamy Sastrulu & Sons, 1962), p 70.

³⁹ 1999, T. Varadachary, *Tirumala: The Panorama of Seven Hills: A Pilgrim's Guide to Tirumala* (Tirupati, India: The Executive Officer, Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 1999), p 25.

⁴⁰ Memo, TTD, Kalyanakatta Complex, Tirumala, K7/97/KKC/Tml/2009, Item No 387, Page No 77, "Sub: TTD – Kalyanakatta Complex, Tirumala – Disposal of Human Hair – Revision of Varieties of Human Hair for early floating of Tenders – Approval – Requested – Regarding." Online, accessed at tirumala.org on 3 Feb 2014.

⁴¹ *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British and Foreign India, China and Australia* (May-Aug 1831), p 94.

⁴² Eck, *India: A Sacred Geography* (New York: Harmony Books, 2012), p 527 n 27.

⁴³ Religious scholar Benjamin Fleming offers a complementary interpretation, arguing that when votaries are asked by outsiders why they offer their hair, they "convey a view of hair as pure. In this, they may have been evoking the symbolic sense or experience of the act of removing the hair, as some kind of self-sacrifice or as part of the hardship of the vow itself and the other activities associated with it. In this broader symbolic sense, the whole act of the vow must be taken into consideration: the hair is only a small element within this larger schema, but the schema of the vow may shape the

But the broader point is that some pilgrims believed hair was worthy of placing in the hundi, alongside other more obviously valuable and fungible items such as gold or currency. By taking its place in the hundi, hair became an offering that was not simply worthless or, even worse, polluted, but instead entered the discourse surrounding Tirupati offerings as valuable in itself.

Hair as revenue

We should not be surprised by the idea that tonsured hair could be seen by pilgrims as valuable, for it was highly valued by other members of hair's commodity chain: temple barbers and temple officials. In this next section of the paper, I will explore a different aspect of the market for tonsures and tonsured hair, a story that pits barbers against officials in a competition to control two revenue streams: the revenues from giving haircuts, and the revenues from selling cut hair. Moreover, this negotiation over tonsure revenues also entangled pilgrims, as barbers and temple officials contributed to a broader public discourse that labeled and legitimized offered hair as a valuable commodity.

As we have seen in the account of Gaspar Correia, barbers were tonsuring Tirupati pilgrims since at least the 16th century. As the Tirupati barbers describe it, their "forefathers" first performed tonsures at Srinivasa Mangapuram, a temple located 12 km to the west of the main Tirupati temple, along the Kalyani River – a site that gave rise to the name "Kalyanakatta." Later, the barbers recall, their predecessors moved to Tirumala mountain, at the Mangalabhavi area – at the top of the hill, and currently the site of the MBC cottages. Correia's report likely describes this new position, closer to Tirupati temple but still on the outskirts of the temple complex. A final move brought the barbers to a rise that overlooks the temple, where the main Kalyanakatta building is today.⁴⁴

Today, Tirupati's barbers are temple employees, like the workers on the hill who make food, drive buses, and tally hundi contents. But it was not always this way; the barbers who worked on the hill have a long, contentious relationship with the temple, centered on the right to tonsure. The story of a 1953 dispute illustrates the issue. In that year, the Kalyanakatta Mirasidars' Sangham and the Tirumala-Tirupathi Devasthanams Committee united to sue 11 barbers, charging that the unaffiliated barbers had illegally tonsured pilgrims. At issue: who had a right to tonsure, and who owned the hair that was cut? Actually, the two questions were entwined.⁴⁵

Tirumala had a long-running formal relationship with official barbers, who were members of the Sangham – that is, the barbers' association – though not official employees of the temple. Most recently, in 1946, the barbers' Sangham signed an agreement with Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) officials to divvy up the revenues from tonsure. Under the agreement, pilgrims would be charged Rs. 0-4-6 for each tonsure. Rs. 0-3-0 would go to the Sangham as an organization; 0-1-0 would go to the temple; and 0-0-6 to the barber who performed the tonsure. The agreement also specified a revenue split for the hair shaved off the pilgrim's head, which would be sold in auction to local buyers: 75% of the proceeds would go to the barbers' Sangham, while 25% would go to the temple.⁴⁶

perception of the meaning of the hair, and especially its explanation to outsiders." Benjamin J. Fleming, "From Tirupati to Brooklyn: Interpreting Hindu Votive Hair-Offerings," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40, No. 2 (2011), p 211.

⁴⁴ Memo, TTD, Properties Cell, Prop1/5307/2010, Item No. 412, Page No. 156, "Sub: TTD – Properties Cell, Tirupati – Allotment of land and construction of Community Hall at Tirupati for TTD KKC Employees Welfare Association, Tirumala, Regarding," p 156. Online document accessed at tirumala.org, 3 Feb 2014.

⁴⁵ PTI, "Tonsure Right Dispute: Temple Income May Be Hit," *Times of India* 23 Feb 1953.

⁴⁶ Memo, TTD, Technical Establishment, ROC.NO.TL6/13932/96, Item No. 855, Page No. 17, "TTDs – Technical Establishment – K.K.C. Wing – Representation of the Barbers, K.K. Complex, Tirumala to regularise their service from the year 1975 – Matter placed before the Board – Regarding." Online document accessed at tirumala.org, 3 Feb 2014.

This type of financial agreement had precedent at Tirupati, and indeed at temples across India. In 1803, British East India Company official George Stratton, a revenue collector for the area that included the Tirupati temple complex, evaluated Tirupati as a potential revenue source. Stratton noted that a wide variety of temple services were “farmed” to the highest bidders – the idea being that if the Company entertained bids to become the exclusive, official provider of these services, it would maximize the revenue of the temple (and thus the British East India Company, which controlled Tirupati revenues). Though Stratton himself objected to these farms, he nevertheless listed them, including rights to sell “Waga buddee,” or “sweet-meats which have been prepared by the Renter and previously presented to the idol”; “Tunk Buddee,” a license for collecting a tax on every pagoda’s worth of goods sold by shopkeepers; and “Namaloo angadee,” “the exclusive privilege of selling a particular white chalk required for marking the forehead found on the Tripatty hill.” Stratton likewise recorded two tonsure “farms”: “Hajam Goota” and “Caluanghuttum” (Kalyanakatta), under which barbers purchased the right to charge pilgrims for their tonsures. Under rules set by temple officials, Hajam Goota offered the right to charge pilgrims 1 1/2 fanams for a tonsure in a location “about the Hills,” while Caluanghuttum was the right to impose the same charge on pilgrims tonsured “below the hill.” (For comparison, we can note that every pilgrim was charged a 3 fanams “pilgrim tax” just to walk up the hill.)⁴⁷

When the Sangham cut a deal with the temple in 1946 for a particular revenue split, it thus built on previous deals for sharing revenue from haircuts and tonsured hair. The 1946 deal differed from previous deals, however, in specifying that, going forward, the Kalyanakatta building was to be constructed and managed by the temple, not by the barbers, though the barbers continued to be self-employed rather than employees of the temple. This set up an interlocking set of rights:

- the temple took over the right to locate and manage Kalyanakatta buildings;
- the barbers’ Sangham maintained the exclusive right to tonsure pilgrims within those buildings;
- the temple and Sangham shared revenues from haircuts and tonsured hair;
- while the Sangham reserved the right to restrict its membership using mirasi, or hereditary, rules.

This last point warrants additional explanation. It wasn’t just anyone who could become a member of the barbers’ Sangham; instead, a barber’s family maintained the right to pass membership from father to son. In this way, the 1946 deal reveals how the temple’s property in “farming” or licensing the right to tonsure intersected with the Sangham’s property rights in employment, and moreover suggests that both sides could maintain their rights and revenues only in a tonsure market that was closed to other, unofficial participants.⁴⁸

So now let’s return to 1953 and the suit against the 11 unofficial barbers. At the center of the case was the idea that the unofficial barbers were “fraudulently and dishonestly” encouraging pilgrims to receive tonsures that lacked “divine or mundane sanction.” The Sangham argued that unofficial tonsure defrauded the official barbers by depriving them of their “legitimate, sole, and exclusive right” – the right to tonsure that had been negotiated with the temple, formerly called a

⁴⁷ Quoted in N. Ramesan, *The Tirumala Temple* (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, 2009 [1980]), pp 495-503.

⁴⁸ In 1975, TTD and the Sangham agreed to make barbers official temple employees, and in return abolish mirasi rights. Yet the agreement also specified that membership in the barbers’ Sangham was still hereditary; and that membership could be transferred not only to sons but to any proxy barber designated by the barber’s family – continuing to grant a property right in tonsuring services. Memo, TTD, Kalyanakatta Complex, K7/28/KKC/TML/2007, Item No. 613, Page No. 72, “Sub: TTD – Kalyanakatta (sic) Complex, Tirumala – To regularize the Services of Proxies in the cadre of Tonsurer in Time Scale – Request – Regarding.” Online, accessed at tirumala.org on 3 Feb 2014.

“farm.” But underlying this “mundane” right to tonsure revenues lay a more complicated “divine” sanction, offered by the temple (and, presumably, the god). At the heart of the Sangham and temple’s claim was the assertion that any hair shaved from a pilgrim belonged exclusively to Venkateswara – since the hair was an offering to the Lord.⁴⁹

A 1957 article on an appeal by 5 unofficial barbers against TTD and the Sangham expanded on this logic. The judge in the case noted that TTD and the Sangham were not trying to stop unofficial barbers from tonsuring altogether – just from tonsuring pilgrims. He suggested that pilgrims who were shaved by non-mirasi barbers could not be certain that their hair actually would go to the temple and Venkateswara; and moreover, that the temple could not be sure of collecting its share from the sale of offered hair. Indeed, the judge suggested, because Venkateswara and the temple had exclusive right to the hair, the temple had a corresponding prima facie right to control who could tonsure and who could not, all in order to ensure that hair offered to Venkateswara would redound to his credit.⁵⁰

Over the next decades, a temple’s default ownership of offered hair was tested several times, and in each case I’ve identified, judges sided with the temple. In 1966, for instance, the Kanteshwara Temple in Karnataka successfully sued to prevent local barbers from tonsuring pilgrims, arguing for hair that “what is vowed to the Lord belongs to the Lord,” as a summary of the case put it.⁵¹ Similarly, when the TTD administration finally decided in 1975 to take over all aspects of the tonsuring process, employing barbers as official employees, they successfully went to court to prevent a group of unofficial barbers from operating outside TTD control.⁵² In 1979, a Madras high court sided with temple officials over temple barbers at the Mariamman temple in Sattur, overturning a lower court decision to assert that hair was a “kanikkai,” or offering to the deity, and thus belonged to the temple.⁵³ And in 1981, a court ruled for TTD against a breakaway faction of unofficial barbers, ending the practice of unofficial tonsure on the hill.⁵⁴

Let’s take a moment to sum up this twisted chain of rights and ownership. By default, Venkateswara owned any hair offered by a pilgrim, no matter the circumstances in which it was offered. As a result, TTD officials had the right to control the hair that was offered, since they were considered to be the representatives of the god. TTD officials therefore also had the right to designate tonsure barbers – a right that carried along with it a steady source of revenue for both the temple and its official barbers. And finally, the barbers’ Sangham, thanks to its negotiated agreement with the temple, maintained the right to regulate tonsure barbers; who in turn possessed mirasi or hereditary rights to membership in the Sangham, a right that likewise attached to a revenue source.

And what kind of revenues were we talking about? For the temple’s administrative year 1952-53, tonsuring charges brought in revenue of Rs. 20,000. (This excludes revenues from hair auctions, for which I do not have figures.) Over the next few years, as increasing numbers of

⁴⁹ PTI, “Tonsure Right Dispute: Temple Income May Be Hit,” *Times of India*, 23 Feb 1953.

⁵⁰ Article from the *Hindu* quoted in Edmund R. Leach, “Magical Hair,” *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 88, No. 2 (Jul-Dec 1958), appendix, p 162.

⁵¹ Rao, *Administration of Temples* (1974), p 87-88.

⁵² Ch. Purnachandra Rao, *Census of India, 1981, Andhra Pradesh*, p 245.

⁵³ UNI, “Tonsured hair belongs to temple,” *Times of India* 10 Jan 1979.

⁵⁴ Ch. Purnachandra Rao, *Census of India, 1981, Andhra Pradesh*, p 245. A court case decided in 1980 included the following history supporting the temple’s right over tonsures which, it began, “was, in fact, confirmed by the High Court in 1963. See the judgment dated 23-7-1963 in S. A. No. 156 of 1960. For over a century, beginning from a decision reported in (1887) ILR 12 Bom 247 followed up by the decisions in (1896) ILR 23 Cal 645 and ILR 31 Mad 771 (sic) down to the decision of a Division Bench of the Madras High Court in A. S. No. 105 of 1977 dated 22-1-1979, the principle enunciated that under the law the Temple is the owner of the hair which its pilgrims leave behind after tonsure and that the barber, and for that matter, even the Pujaris and other service-holders attached to the temple, have no title to the hair, is well entrenched.” S. Ramayya And Ors. vs Government Of Andhra Pradesh And Ors., 19 Aug 1980, AIR 1981 AP 8, Author: S Reddy. Accessed at www.indiankanoon.org/doc/1487947, 1 Jun 2014.

pilgrims visited Tirupati (due to better and cheaper transportation to the hilltop, as well as better accommodations), official tonsure revenues rose steadily, with the temple's share reaching Rs. 205,000 for 1962-63 – about 2% of the temple's total revenues.⁵⁵

But this figure, of course, represents only a portion of the total possible revenue from tonsure and hair sales. Under the 1946 agreement, the temple's share of tonsuring charges (after barber salary) was 25% compared to 75% going to the Sangham. Thus, for 1962-63, the total implied revenue from tonsure was Rs. 820,000 for the year.⁵⁶ What's more, despite Sangham and TTD efforts to prevent unofficial barbers from tonsuring pilgrims, there are indications that a large number continued to do so. One source suggests that in 1965, about 40% of tonsure hair was cut by unofficial barbers; another suggests that in 1975, there were as many unofficial barbers as official barbers.⁵⁷ This means overall potential tonsure revenue must have been even higher, perhaps reaching Rs. 1,400,000.

The Tirupati temple board recognized this, and in 1975, renegotiated its revenue-sharing agreement with the Sangham, while encouraging unofficial barbers into the fold as well. Under the new agreement, the temple employed all official and unofficial barbers directly, paying a salary and a small fee for each tonsure in return for control over all other tonsure and hair revenues. As a result, we can get a sense of the total tonsure and hair profit at stake by comparing figures for 1974-75 (the last full year barbers were self-employed) to figures for 1976-77 (the first full year barbers were employed by the temple). In 1974-75, the temple took in Rs. 756,000 in revenues; in 1976-77, it netted Rs. 1,824,930, more than doubling its take even after expenses. The upshot: the temple, and the barbers, stood to lose a lot of money if unofficial barbers operated, and stood to make a lot of money by directing pilgrims to the official Kalyanakatta.⁵⁸

It is not surprising, then, that the temple worked to create a discourse that encouraged pilgrims to connect tonsuring with property rights and financial value through occasional promotional efforts. In September 1957, for instance, the temple placed an ad in the *Bulletin* that warned visiting pilgrims to patronize only official temple services provided by officially sanctioned Sangham members. (A relationship that recalls the “farms” of the 19th century.) If you wanted to partake in particular religious rites, such as a puja or marriage, the temple urged you to hire only attendants working for the Theerthavasi Purohit Sangham; while if you wanted to buy quality trinkets to place in the hundi, the temple asked you to purchase them only from members of the officially sanctioned Shroff Merchants Association. At the top of this list of official vendors was the

⁵⁵ S. Subbaramaiah, *Finances of an Indian Temple: A Case Study of the Finances of Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams (1951-1963)* (Jullundur City, India: International Book Company, 1968), p 17.

⁵⁶ Bhaskara Venugopal, “Finances of Tirumala-Tirupathi Temples,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 13, No. 13 (1 Apr 1978), pp. 571-572.

⁵⁷ Memo, to [US] Department of State from Amconsul, MADRAS, INDIA, 24 Aug 1965, Subj: State Trading Corporation Plans For Dominating South India Human Hair Trade, folder “Inco-Beauticians Equipment,” Box 1085, RG 59 (State Department), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park (NARA); Ch. Purnachandra Rao, *Census of India, 1981, Andhra Pradesh*, p 245. A suggestive but flawed account of Tirupati tonsuring from 1967 suggests that unofficial barbers may have attracted pilgrim customers by actually *paying* pilgrims the equivalent of 10 cents to cut their hair. One can imagine that this could work because global demand for Indian hair was high in 1967. Yet I have not seen reference to this practice in any other source, and the article from which it was taken contains a significant mistake in referring to “mainland Chinese” wigmakers helping to train workers at the Wig India factory, when the workers were from Hong Kong. Warren Unna, “India’s Wig Traders Have a Splitting Headache,” *Washington Post*, 11 Apr 1967.

⁵⁸ Bhaskara Venugopal, “Finances of Tirumala-Tirupathi Temples,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 13, No. 13 (1 Apr 1978), pp. 571-72; “Table M,” in Ch. Purnachandra Rao, *Census of India, 1981, Andhra Pradesh*, p 247. The figure for 1974-75 does not include expenses, for which I did not have figures. However, the revenue agreement with the Sangham made costs minimal (essentially the cost of maintaining the Kalyanakatta building). Under the new agreement, 1976-77 revenues were Rs. 3,012,010 while expenses were significant at Rs. 1,187,080.

Kalyanakatta Sangham: pilgrims were told that temple officials had selected a “special place” for the Kalyanakatta, or tonsuring hall, on Tirumala Mountain: “at the entrance to Tirumala Village for the Pilgrims, who have taken a vow, to offer their hair to God Venkateswara,” noting that “All conveniences have been arranged there for such purpose.” Assigning a financial value to the tonsure, the ad noted that pilgrims would pay a small fee – Rs. 0-4-6 per head – for a clean shave at this official Kalyanakatta; and they were “cautioned to be very careful, to see that their offerings of hair, are made only at the ‘Kalyana Katta.’” The temple, it was mentioned, received “A portion” of the Rs. 0-4-6 fee; and if pilgrims used barbers outside of the official Sangham, “no portion of their contribution reaches the Devasthanams” – meaning that their offering would come to nothing.⁵⁹

A 1976 full-page ad – placed soon after the temple agreed to take on the entire Tirumala hair and tonsure business, and apparently at a time when some unofficial barbers still had not accepted temple employment – likewise offered “hints to pilgrims” on tonsuring. It was more explicit than the 1957 ad in helping pilgrims to link the votive act of tonsure with the legal and property discourse that the temple used to assert its rights to control tonsures and tonsured hair. Unofficial barbers, the ad warned, were “trying to lure away pilgrims to private barber shops by offering lower tonsure charges and promising quicker darshan”; but “the mere shaving of the head somewhere else by some unauthorised barber is not in keeping with the sanctity of the vow as only the hair removed by the Devasthanam barbers is offered to the Lord.” The ad said instead that “the vow is fulfilled only if it is done in the manner prescribed by tradition and the hair offered to the Lord,” adding that hair shaved by unofficial barbers “does not reach the Lord.” Hair offering, the ad suggested, carried multiple burdens: it was a symbol, representing the “shedding of human vanity and the complete surrender of oneself to the Divine Grace of the Lord”; a hallowed “tradition” with a long train of cultural expectations; the fulfillment of a vow through an almost-transactional process, with strict rules for fulfillment; and a significant financial contribution to the Lord and his temple. The joy of surrendering to Venkateswara was paired with the fear of failing him, making the tonsure an important act indeed. We can also note that pilgrims were expected to manage among these multiple meanings, braiding them together in a way that strengthened their attachment to the temple and its god.⁶⁰

The result of these efforts, combined with other promotional efforts including temple-produced films and books, was that a 1984 government report touching on Tirupati tonsures concluded that pilgrims believed the main Kalyanakatta was the “appropriate” hall for tonsure, “meant for the purpose” by TTD. “Further, there is also a sentimental feeling of the pilgrims that Lord Venkateswara would satisfy if they offer their hair in this particular Kalyanakatta only,” revealing how successfully TTD’s discourse had helped to connect the tonsure’s disparate meanings. Indeed, TTD needed to connect these meanings, helping hair to accumulate its sacred, financial, symbolic, and cultural identities, in order to ensure that the temple controlled the hair that flowed through its tonsure sheds, sanctums, hundi, and godowns.⁶¹

Hair as raw material

The final section of this paper examines why and how tonsure hair was sold, focusing especially on India’s participation in the global wig trade between 1965 and 1975. While Tirupati remains at the center of the story, we add a second major site: Wig India, a wig factory built on the

⁵⁹ Advertisement, “T.T.D. Authorised Sanghams at Tirumala (Tirupati),” *Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (Sep 1957), p 16.

⁶⁰ Advertisement, “The Offering of Tonsure to the Lord” *Bhavan’s Journal* XXIII, No. 4 (12 Sep 1976), p 2.

⁶¹ Ch. Purnachandra Rao, *Census of India, 1981, Andhra Pradesh*, p 246.

Ambattur Industrial Estate at the northwest edge of Madras. As the global wig industry boomed during the 1960s, demand for hair surged, too – including Indian hair. Thus, this section examines how Tirupati provided a significant source of hair for the wig business, at the same time Wig India produced wigs using that hair. Wig India was a state-owned factory, launched to help India move up the value chain through industrialization. At a time when global hair supplies were short, India's ample hair sources enabled Wig India to try to capture the value created when raw hair was woven into finished wigs. The story of Wig India is therefore a story of global connections, as Wig India was founded to export both raw hair and manufactured wigs to the global wig market, competing with established wigmakers in South Korea and Hong Kong especially. Wig India, in other words, helped to transform Tirupati from a largely local site of hair production and exchange into a site that participated in national and global markets.

Yet the story of Wig India is a story of rise and fall, as the Indian state's move into wig manufacturing failed after a few short years, and control of tonsure hair returned to Tirupati. Throughout this brief life, Wig India's hairgoods were buffeted not only by the expected forces of global competition but also by the biography of the hair stitched into the wigs. That is, Indian wigs could not shed the racial, religious, historical, and personal stories embedded in the hairs they carried. To understand this story, let's start where it also ends, returning to Tirupati.

In late spring 1965, India's Commerce Minister, Manubhai Shah, visited Tirupati. After his trip, Shah developed a "keen interest" in using Tirupati's tonsure hair as an export commodity, one observer reported, so the minister began a series of dramatic steps, most of which involved India's State Trading Corporation (STC).⁶² The STC was formed under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in 1956 to create a state-owned business entity that could help manage India's export and import trade, especially state-to-state trade with Communist countries (though its trade with non-Communist countries actually was larger). STC quickly became India's largest single player in the import-export business, helping to facilitate export sales of shoes, coffee, and ivory to the Soviet Union, salt to Indonesia, and iron and manganese to the US and Japan, as well as imports of cement from Poland and ships from Yugoslavia. The idea was that STC might move into trading almost any commodity.⁶³

In May 1965, it was therefore understandable (if, perhaps, peculiar) when STC made its first moves into the burgeoning hair field. Press and trade journal reports began to signal that STC sought control of the export of human hair to Japan – then a major wigmaker and thus hair buyer. But observers believed this was just an opening gambit; and indeed, in mid-June, STC informed the temple that from that date forward, all hair cut by TTD's official barbers would be sold to STC. STC would pay the temple a price set by averaging the price of hair sold by TTD at auction over the previous year; TTD, for its part, was asked to stop selling hair to the public at auction, and to stop unofficial barbers from cutting hair. (As we have seen, unofficial barbers continued their work into the 1970s.)⁶⁴

Let's briefly detour to discuss temple hair auctions. To dispose of the hair offered to Venkateswara, Tirupati staged occasional hair auctions. The earliest mention of TTD-led auctions I have found is a 1953 article describing the proceeds from the auction of tonsure hair. The article

⁶² Memo, to [US] Department of State from Amconsul, MADRAS, INDIA, 24 Aug 1965, Subj: State Trading Corporation Plans For Dominating South India Human Hair Trade.

⁶³ K.R. Gupta, *Working of State Trading in India* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1970), pp 44-52; UPI, "State Trading Corporation Set Up In Delhi: Organising Exports and Imports," *Times of India*, 19 May 1956; PTI, "State Trading Corporation," *Times of India*, 3 Jun 1956; Times of India News Service, "State Trading Corporation Extends Its Activities: Biggest Single Concern in Export-Import," *Times of India* 30 Mar 1957.

⁶⁴ Memo, to [US] Department of State from Amconsul, MADRAS, INDIA, 24 Aug 1965, Subj: State Trading Corporation Plans For Dominating South India Human Hair Trade.

notes that although the hair “rightly belongs to the Devasthanam,” hair auction proceeds nonetheless were split between barbers and the temple, presumably along the lines of the 1946 temple-barber agreement.⁶⁵ Hair auctioned in spring 1962, for instance, raised Rs. 98,322.50, with TTD taking Rs. 24,850.62, or 25%.⁶⁶ I have found earlier mentions of temple hair auctions at Simhachalam temple, also in Andhra Pradesh; from at least 1916, the temple advertised public auctions of hair tonsured at its *puttukoppulu* (“shaving shed”), dividing the hair into two or three classes based on length.⁶⁷ In the 1960s, Tirupati also auctioned its diverse *hundi* offerings – from gold and silver (“converted” into bars) to “wrist watches, fountain pens, radios, cameras, etc.” These public auctions were advertised in newspapers, indicating to readers that *hundi* contents circulated after donation. At least some pilgrims thus understood that their sacred offerings were evaluated and priced according to the whims of secular buyers and sellers; and indeed, lived a life beyond their brief sacred moments, sometimes even in the hands of dealers who did not care where the objects had come from. Indeed, such classified ads and auctions publicized to pilgrims that their offerings were “converted” directly into commodities, that is, goods or formats that were supposed to circulate beyond the walls of the temple. Meanwhile, the profits realized from their sale accrued to the temple’s benefit, so that even as objects or gold bars left Tirumala mountain, the monetary value of the offering lived on in temple coffers, where it could add to temple savings or be spent on temple services – converted into yet a third form, and living a sacred life beyond the hundi.

Until the 1960s, most Tirupati tonsure hair had been sold to local buyers, who wove hair into wigs for Indian wearers, or sold it as padding for men’s suits or to make filters that sopped up industrial oil.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, there was a small export industry that shipped hair abroad, as India exported Rs. 1,611,000 of hair and hair products in 1962-63 and Rs. 1,141,000 in 1963-64.⁶⁹ For instance, wigmaker George Lau, known as the “father” of the Hong Kong wig industry, noted in 1964 that he traveled regularly to India to purchase hair.⁷⁰ When Manubhai Shah stepped in to buy all Tirupati tonsure hair in June 1965, there was even speculation that he had done so in order to stop American wigmaker Alfred Klugmann from creating a joint venture with Tirupati that would be the exclusive producer of wigs made from temple hair. The Indian government had learned about the deal and was concerned about its exclusivity, and instead moved to establish its own monopoly over temple hair.⁷¹ By August 1965, STC had approved a similar exclusive deal with Palani temple in Tamil Nadu, though Palani received a higher price for its hair than Tirupati (to loud complaints from TTD officials). Between the two temples, STC had locked up the two biggest sources of hair in the country.

Controlling hair supplies was the first step for STC; the second and even more controversial step was building a factory to produce wigs from these hair sources, helping India to capture industrial revenues rather than simply profiting from the “raw material” of hair. So in mid-1965, the

⁶⁵ PTI, “Tonsure Right Dispute: Temple Income May Be Hit,” *Times of India* 23 Feb 1953.

⁶⁶ *Finances of an Indian Temple*, p 28 n 11, citing the temple *Bulletin* Jun 1962, p 256.

⁶⁷ Classified advertisement, “Notice,” *Allahabad Leader*, 13 Aug 1916, p2; classified advertisement, “For Sale,” *Amrita Bazar Patrika* [Calcutta], 1 Dec 1917, p1; classified advertisement, “Notice,” *Allahabad Leader*, 5 Aug 1918, p2; classified advertisement, *Allahabad Leader*, 16 Aug 1919, p2; classified advertisement, *Allahabad Leader*, 12 Aug 1922, p2.

⁶⁸ J. Anthony Lukas, “A Wig Maker Finds India Rich Raw Material: Hair of High Quality Plentiful There, American Says,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1966.

⁶⁹ “Human Hair: STC Failure,” *Enlite* (26 Oct 1968), p 22; “Current Topics: Wig Exports,” *Times of India*, 6 Jun 1967. Most of the export revenue came from hair, with little from wigs, since at the beginning of the 1960s, wigs were a cottage industry, and the wigs produced were “much below the international standards” for quality, according to one report. Gupta, *Working of State Trading*, p 168.

⁷⁰ R.H. Leary, “Scalp-Hunting in Kowloon,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (23 Jul 1964), pp 177-79.

⁷¹ Memo, to [US] Department of State from Amconsul, MADRAS, INDIA, 24 Aug 1965, Subj: State Trading Corporation Plans For Dominating South India Human Hair Trade, NACP.

Commerce Ministry approved a plan to set up a state-owned, state-run wigmaking factory in Madras. The plan came together in October 1965, when STC announced a deal with the Lion Rock Trading Company, a Hong Kong-based import/export outfit run by itinerant New York entrepreneur Murray Robins, to set up Wig India.

By moving into manufacturing, STC was branching out from its earlier focus on trading; and Lion Rock was hired to escort STC through the process of building one of India's first export-oriented factories. The Government of India's commitment to the venture ran deep. First, the factory was set up 3 miles outside of Madras in Ambattur, on one of India's new industrial estates – government-developed zones that incubated new companies, nurturing India's industrial growth. Wig India was allotted a corner plot to the southwest of the Estate, where it custom-built a factory intended for more than 1,000 workers. In December 2013, when I visited the site, the old factory building was still standing – though now it is occupied by a different government-run factory, Hindustan Photo Films.⁷²

In January 1966, Lion Rock sent three wig technicians from Hong Kong to Ambattur to help with selecting, procuring, and installing machinery for the new Wig India factory. Eventually, five Lion Rock technicians were on site in Madras to train Indian workers in how to process and dye hair; teach them how to produce hand-made and machine-made wigs “according to the latest fashion prevailing in world markets”; share “all necessary formulae, technical know-how, mystery of trade, secret process etc.” with Wig India managers; and assist Wig India in marketing wigs around the globe. Government of India support was again critical for getting the collaboration off the ground, as Indian officials paved the way for the technicians to come, expediting their visas; dispatching a bureaucrat to Hong Kong to negotiate details of the Hong Kong-India collaboration; and approving import licenses for sewing machines from Hong Kong and Japan. Lion Rock's charge for its expertise was 5% of Wig India's future export sales for five years, plus travel and living expenses for Lion Rock's technicians – a good deal, STC declared in a 1969 review of its operations, as “The advisers taken from Hong Kong had given good service” during their 18-month stint in Madras.⁷³

During this training period in 1966, STC took its final steps to consolidate control over the hair and wig industry. First, in August 1966, it moved to “canalise” all hair and wig exports, making STC the only official outlet for hair and wig export production in India. Under canalization, STC reserved right of approval over any export of hair or wigs from India, no matter who produced it – meaning that private exporters now were required to jump through STC hoops: passing their hair and hair products through government-approved screening committees, abiding by price floors set by STC, and funneling 1% of the value of their letters of credit to STC. STC said the idea behind canalization was to improve export quality by regularizing production and increasing quality

⁷² Ambattur Industrial Area Inauguration Special Issue, *Ind-Com Journal* (Jul 1965); D. Nagaiya, *Industrial Estates Programme: The Indian Experience* (Hyderabad: Small Industry Extension Training Institute, 1971), pp 204-11.

⁷³ PTI, “Hair-Processing Unit,” *Times of India*, 24 Jan 1966. Memo, AmConsul MADRAS (Albert Franklin) to Department of State, subject “State Trading Corporation Wig Manufacturing Collaboration,” 7 Dec 1965, folder “Indo-Beauticians Equipment,” Box 1085, “Central Foreign Policy Files: Economic: Industries & Commodities, INCO Animals and Animal Husbandry to INCO Beauticians Equipment,” 1964-66; Memo, AmConsul Madras (Caldwell) to Department of State, subject “Export of Human Hair and Hair Products from India (Report No. 3),” 14 Jun 1967, both in RG 59, State Department, NACP. Ministry of Foreign Trade and Supply, *Committee on Public Undertakings (1968-69), Fourth Lok Sabha, Fifty-First Report, State Trading Corporation of India Limited* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1969), pp 28-31. B.B. Gujral, “Wigs – a new line of export,” in State Trading Corporation, *Eleventh Anniversary Number* (New Delhi: State Trading Corporation, 1967), pp 23-26. “Raw material from 40 temples,” *The Irish Times*, 26 Jan 1970. “Hindus and HK firm help India's shortage of cash,” *South China Morning Post*, 24 Jun 1967, HKPRO 533.

standards; private hair and wig exporters protested that this was simply a grab for power and profits.⁷⁴

Canalization set the stage for STC's final step in asserting control over the hair and wig industries in October 1966: a US\$22.5 million deal with Fashion Tress, an American wig company that claimed to sell 70% of wigs in the US.⁷⁵ In interviews after the deal was announced, Fashion Tress President Rowland Schaefer explained why he thought India had become "the key to the world wig business": "India has the greatest reservoir of fine quality hair any place in the world," hair that was perfectly suited for the US market "because Indians are basically Caucasians and their hair is soft and fine like Caucasian hair, not brittle and coarse like other Asian hair."⁷⁶ Schaefer failed to mention another reason why Indian hair had become popular: the November 1965 embargo imposed by the US Treasury Department against "Asiatic" hair. To understand the embargo and the search for non-European "Caucasian" hair, we must briefly consider how hair was racialized in the hair and wig industries.

During the wig wave of the 1950s-70s, wigmakers in America and Europe promoted a racial hierarchy of hair, arguing that hair from different "racial" groups was better or worse, depending on the person and purpose. Wigmakers Doris and Paul Fleischer of New York's Joseph Fleischer & Co., who traced their wigmaking heritage back to 1830s Vienna, offered a typical hierarchy. In their 1953 catalog of hairpieces – partial wigs that were integrated with one's own hair, such as braids, falls (long tresses), and chignons (a knot at the back of the head) – the Fleischers argued that hair fell into three categories: "first quality" European hair, "from and for the white race," which was "luxuriant, soft, generally wavy or curly"; "second quality" Indian hair, which was "fairly limp and lacking in vitality"; and third quality "Chinese or Oriental hair," which was "coarse, stiff and dark in color, with no tendency to curl."⁷⁷

In fact, the wigmakers imagined a much more finely layered hierarchy. In a 1955 interview, the Fleischers told a *New York Times* reporter that "The hair of Celtic, Scandinavian, and Teutonic peoples...is unsuited to the trade because of its fineness...[while] Southern Europeans have hair that is naturally wavy and of stronger texture." As a result, the best hair, some wigmakers suggested, came from Italian "peasant girls" who were beyond the market: a 1954 story in *Life* magazine recounted how hair "Buyers circulate among the peasant women at regular intervals trading pots and pans, needles, thread, thimbles and the like – seldom cash – for hair." Others said the best hair came from convents, shorn from new nuns when they took their final vows. These hair "safaris," as Joseph Fleischer called them, were a staple of the literature that attempted to explain and exoticize wigs for American and European buyers in the 1950s and 1960s. They deliberately removed hair from market exchange, the better to protect wigwearers from the pollution of a commoditized body part.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Comptroller and Auditor-General [India], *Central Government Audit Report (Commercial), 1969* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1969); Committee on Public Undertakings (Fourth Lok Sabha), *Fifty-First Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings (1968-69)*, *State Trading Corporation of India Limited* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1969), pp 30-31; Committee on Public Undertakings (Fourth Lok Sabha), *Fifty-Fourth Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings (1969-70)*, *Action Taken by Government on the Action taken by Government on the Recommendations Contained in the Fifty-First Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1969), pp 7-9.

⁷⁵ Gupta, *Working of State Trading*, p 163; "Export of Human Hair, Wigs and Wiglets made of Human Hair," *Indian Trade Journal* (14 Sep 1966), pA910; "Export of Human Hair, Wigs and Wiglets made of Human Hair" [Nos. G-92/66 and G-94/66], *Indian Trade Journal* (14 Sep 1966), pp A910-11; Memo, AmConsul MADRAS to Department of State, Subj: Export of Human Hair and Hair Products from India (Report No. 3), folder "STR 9-1, CHICOM, 5/1/67," Box 1398, RG 59, State Department, NACP (IMG 969).

⁷⁶ Lukas, "A Wig Maker Finds India Rich Raw Material," 26 Oct 1966.

⁷⁷ Joseph Fleischer Company, *Joseph Fleischer creates fashion's crowning glory* (New York: Joseph Fleischer Company, 1953), p 1A.

⁷⁸ Brendan M. Jones, "Hair-Raising Trade Boomed by TV," *New York Times*, 14 Aug 1955; Theodore C. Turpin, "Boom in Wigs Boosts Human Hair Demand; Foreigners Lift Price," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 Oct 1962; Richard Madden, "The

As noted above, Indian hair was initially slotted into this hierarchy as “second quality” – higher quality than Chinese hair but lower quality than European hair. Two things happened to change that. First, between 1958 and 1964, wigs became so popular that “first quality” European sources began to run out of reasonably priced hair, which encouraged wigmakers to look for cheaper sources. They found them in Asia, and more precisely, mostly in China, which quickly became the main global source of non-European hair. By 1965, as Hong Kong became the world’s #1 wigmaker, US Treasury officials began to worry. They estimated that in 1965, at least \$6 million in US currency would flow into Chinese communist coffers – and in a year when Chinese troops had been dispatched to Vietnam, that currency flow needed to stop. In November 1965, Treasury imposed its solution: an embargo against the importation of “Asiatic” hair, aimed at shutting down exports of Chinese hair.⁷⁹

The 1965 embargo built on a much longer history of hair industry regulation and, more broadly, economic warfare to support US empire. We can note first that the 1965 embargo was actually an extension of the 1950 embargo, imposed against the People’s Republic of China to punish its intervention in the Korean War. We could go back even further to note that the 1950 embargo was itself authorized under the “Trading with the Enemy” Act passed during World War I and never repealed – meaning that the “soft” economic warfare of the 1965 Vietnam-era embargo was a product of two earlier wars, Korea and World War I, and American empire’s perpetual state of emergency.⁸⁰ But why was the embargo levied against “Asiatic” hair rather than Communist Chinese hair? To answer, we must follow the tangled strands of race, empire, and commerce.

In the US, the category of “Asiatic” hair was institutionalized in 1913, when Congress revised US tariff law to create “Asiatic hair” as a category distinct from plain old “hair” – a default category that meant hair from Europe. This being a tariff law, the hair in question was hair for commercial purposes, and at the time, commercial hair divided into two broad categories: hair for cosmetic use, such as wigs and hairpieces, and hair for industrial use, such as hair cloth (used to strain oil from crushed plant seeds, like cotton seeds) or hair nets (used to hold hair in place). Industrial hair tended to be Chinese or Japanese, while cosmetic hair was predominantly European, and, as in the 1960s, hair prices reflected that distinction – with Chinese hair fetching low prices, sometimes earning 10 cents on the dollar compared to European hair. These use distinctions were reinforced by racial thought, as American and European buyers worried about placing foreign Chinese hair on their heads. Indeed, for hairgoods merchants, it was common sense to think about Chinese and Japanese hair as conceptually distinct from European hair – different in use, different in cost, even different to the touch – with the result that tariff law reflected that difference.

Indian hair, however, was a special case. Commercially, Indian hair was treated more like Chinese hair: racially tainted, and even medically suspect. In 1893, eight train cars full of Indian and Chinese hair arrived in Paris, intended for use in England and France. With the two hair types grouped together as “Asiatic,” the hair was slurred as diseased and coarse, not to mention 100 times cheaper than European hair.⁸¹ An 1898 article discussed the use of Chinese and Indian hair for wigs, outlining the “elaborate preparation” required to transform the hair from dirty, coarse, and stiff to clean, thin,

Womenfolk Sport Pink, Green Hair--and Wig Producers Profit,” *Wall Street Journal*, 2 Sep 1958; Robert Wallace, “Wigs, Divots, and Doilies,” *Life* (6 Dec 1954), pp 75-86; “Which Head of Hair Isn’t the Phony?,” *Life* (28 Jul 1952), pp 65-66; Nora Martin, “Celebrities’ Many Wigs Are Cared For In Paris,” *Calgary Herald*, 7 Mar 1963; Nan Robertson, “Hair-Pieces Get Demand in New York,” *[Montreal] Gazette*, 23 June 1956.

⁷⁹ Foreign Assets Control regulations of 3 Nov 1965, *Federal Register*, memo, Margaret W. Schwartz to Chester Carre, 5 Oct 1965, “Imports of Wigs Made with CHICOM Origin Human Hair,” FAC No. 53249, folder “FAC-Problems, 1965,” Box 4, Lot 72d175, Entry 5409, RG 59, State Department, NACP.

⁸⁰ United States Senate Special Committee on the Termination of the National Emergency, *Summary of Emergency Power Statutes: A Working Paper Prepared by the Staff of the Special Committee on the Termination of the National Emergency* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1973), p 1.

⁸¹ “Traffic in Dead Folks’ Tresses,” *Washington Post*, 10 Dec 1893.

and flexible. (Even the hair's color was transformed, bleached to a light color or dyed to a deep black to "remove the bluish tint that is peculiar to the hair of the dead.") Of course, the "Chinese or Hindoo" hair was described as different in category from "The finest hair" from France as well as the meanest hair, collected by ragpickers from discarded combings in Paris.⁸²

Yet anthropological discourse took a different perspective: anthropologists were clear in seeing Indian hair as categorically different from Chinese and other "Asiatic" hair, but differed on whether it belonged in the same category as European hair. At the broadest view, Indian hair was often grouped together with European hair. In its 1910 entry for "hair," for instance, *Encyclopedia Britannica* described the turn-of-the-century anthropological consensus. Human hair, *Britannica's* editors summarized, could be grouped into three main categories, corresponding to three main races: coarse, straight Asiatic hair; "wooly," curly African hair; and wavy European hair, which was an evolutionary blend of Asiatic and African stock. According to the logic of hair analysis, coarse, straight Asiatic hair ensnared not only East Asians, like the Chinese and Japanese, but also American Indians; while Indians from the subcontinent were grouped with Europeans as proud possessors of evolutionarily superior wavy hair. For the anthropologists who agreed with this high-level view, hair analysis was a key marker of racial difference, separating Asiatic from European and African on the racial spectrum.⁸³

But this similarity proved a problem to those anthropologists who were troubled by the apparent wavy similarity of Indian and European hair, and wanted instead to argue that hair similarities actually concealed deeper racial differences. They seized on the idea of a "Dravidian" or "aboriginal" race in India to establish this difference, and struggled with different strategies to locate the essential Indian that lurked beneath that wavy, European-seeming hair. Robert Caldwell used language as a basis for difference, arguing that South Indian language similarities proved the existence of a Dravidian race, separate from an Aryan race that spanned Northern Indians and Europeans. Others, like Franz Pruner-Bey, used microscopes to examine cross-sections of hair shafts, creating dozens of finely calibrated racial classifications that permitted observers to locate the almost microscopic physical differences between Aryans such as the "Hindoo Brahman" and "native Indians considered as belonging to the primitive stock." Some, like Oscar Peschel, rejected hair analysis altogether, and relied instead on cranial measurements for differentiation; while by the 20th century, racial theorists had developed theories of interbreeding to differentiate between Europeans and Indians. When two races mixed, Madison Grant argued, the lower race's traits predominated, so that "the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu." Thus, shared wavy hair was merely evidence of interbreeding, not of any essential similarity.⁸⁴

⁸² "False Hair: Annales Industriels," *Current Literature* XXIV, No. 6 (Dec 1898): p 564.

⁸³ "Hair," in Hugh Chisholm, ed. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica; A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information* (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1910), pp 823-24. These categories, in turn, borrowed from 19th century anthropological work on hair, especially work by French anthropologist Franz Pruner-Bey ("On Human Hair as a Race-Character, Examined by Aid of the Microscope," *Anthropological Review* 2, 4 [Feb 1864], pp 1-23), which used microscopic analysis of hair shaft cross-sections to sort humans into three evolutionary baskets: Aryan, African, and Chinese. *Britannica's* editors also included a fourth subsidiary category, "frizzy" hair, which was difficult to distinguish from "negroid wool." For South Asian hair, and reference to the amazing taxonomic maps of Georg Gerland, see William Ripley, *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1899). Also see Sarah Cheang's "Roots: Hair and Race," in Geraldine Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang, eds., *Hair: Styling, Culture and Fashion* (New York: Berg, 2008), pp 27-42. Finally, note that some anthropologists of the time were skeptical about direct links between race and hair. See, for example, Franz Boas, "*The Races of Europe*," by William Z. Ripley," *Science* 20, 244 (1 Sep 1899), pp 292-96.

⁸⁴ Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian Family of Languages* (London: Harrison, 1856), p 513-14; Pruner-Bey, "On Human Hair as a Race-Character, Examined by Aid of the Microscope," pp 18-19; Oscar Peschel, *The Races of Man and Their Geographical Distribution* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1876), p 451; Ripley, *The Races of Europe*, pp 44-45, 436, 450, 457; Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race, or the Racial Basis of European History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1918), pp 18, 25-26, 66-67, 70-71, and 148-49.

Grant returned hair to the middle of racial debates by focusing on hair color, which he argued was a sign of racial interbreeding: “the more ancient, generalized, and lower type” of hair predominated whenever two races mixed, he suggested, with lighter hair indicating racial purity and superiority (“Blond hair...comes everywhere from the Nordic subspecies and nowhere else”) and darker hair indicating lower status (“absolutely black hair certainly does mean an ancestral cross with a dark race”). Thus, “The boast of the modern Indian that he is of the same race as his English ruler is entirely without basis in fact and the little swarthy native lives amid the monuments of a departed grandeur...without the slightest claim to blood kinship,” he wrote. Instead, Southern India was peopled by Dravidians and pre-Dravidians, derived from “Negritos” or from a “more ancient Negroid race.”⁸⁵

These past racialized lives of hair extended into the 1960s, as turn-of-the-century racial categories were plundered for new postwar racial maps. When the US imposed a tariff on “Asiatic hair” in 1913, distinguishing it from plain “hair,” understood to be European, it institutionalized racial categories that were colonial as well as commercial. Then, in 1965, when US Treasury officials wanted to aim their embargo at Chinese hair, they found a handy category – “Asiatic hair” – already on the books, and simply repurposed it for the Cold War. A relic of an earlier colonial racialization thereby became a tool of 1960s US imperial racialization.

And an irony: the 1965 embargo also entangled Asiatic hair with Dravidian hair, contradicting 19th century theories of Dravidian race. When the embargo on “Asiatic hair” was imposed in 1965, an economic net cast toward China actually ensnared all “Asiatic” countries, forcing Treasury Department officials to articulate a new 1960s definition of “Asiatic.” Clearly, China, South Korea, and Japan were Asiatic. But what about the Philippines? Indonesia? Further afield, what about India and Pakistan? Israel and Lebanon? In June 1966, Foreign Assets Control decreed that hair from Indonesia and the Philippines was Asiatic, requiring official exemption; in March 1967, hair from Israel, Lebanon, and Turkey was declared *prima facie* non-Asiatic; and a month later, hair from India, Iran, and Pakistan legally became non-Asiatic, since it could “be reliably determined by physical examination not to be of Communist Chinese, North Korean, or North Vietnamese origin.” Here, we can see how 19th century colonial hair persisted alongside 1965 Cold War hair: customs inspectors were imagined to be able to distinguish between hair types simply by touch, differentiating between coarse East Asian hair and thinner South Asian hair. Yet these physical distinctions were also enlisted to help customs inspectors target the economic activity of a nation, blurring the line between racialized physical characteristics and national denizenship in order to allow hair to be monitored, sorted, and traced. Indeed, as Treasury officials articulated rules for enforcing the embargo, they helped to create a geographic imaginary – a checkerboard of “Asiatic” regions defined by a customs inspector’s ability to split hairs, a map in which old racial classifications clashed with new anti-communist alignments.⁸⁶

What’s more, because the embargo applied to wigs made with Asiatic hair, and not just to wigs produced in Asiatic communist countries, it disrupted wigmaking around the world. As *bona fide* Asiatic countries, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan were immediately enmeshed in the embargo. But in February 1966, after learning that Western European wigs were made with Chinese hair, the US Treasury Department placed a blanket embargo on wigs coming from Great Britain, Belgium, France, West Germany, and Italy – a who’s who of Marshall recipient countries and NATO. (Spain, Portugal, and Austria eventually fell under the embargo, too.) Until these American allies could develop stringent inspection regimes for their hair, the American market was closed.⁸⁷

The disruption was biggest, however, in Hong Kong, which used Chinese hair in most of its wigs. Production plunged until Hong Kong could guarantee it had access to safely non-communist

⁸⁵ Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race*, pp 18, 25-26, 66-67, 70-71, and 148-49.

⁸⁶ Foreign Assets Control regulations of 1 Jun 1966, 8 Mar 1967, and 12 Apr 1967, *Federal Register*.

⁸⁷ Foreign Assets Control regulations of 3 Nov 1965 and 10 Feb 1966, *Federal Register*.

sources of hair. For South Korea, on the other hand, the embargo was an opportunity: owing to accessible supplies of anti-communist Korean hair at home, the South Korea wig industry surged into second place. But South Korea's local hair offered only a short-term fix; to build wig industries that could supply a growing global demand for hair, both South Korea and Hong Kong needed to find reliable sources of non-Communist hair – and they found them in Indonesia and India. While Hong Kong favored Indonesia, South Korea was India's biggest buyer. Actually, in Hong Kong, China continued to be bigger than either source because Chinese hair still could be used in wigs bound for Europe and Africa, where the Americans' embargo against hair was not recognized – and could be woven illegally into American wigs besides. Thus, in 1969, the peak year of hair imports in Hong Kong, Chinese hair accounted for 64% of hair import revenues (HK\$114 million), Indonesian hair 18% (HK\$32 million), and Indian hair 9% (HK\$15 million). In that same year, the situation in South Korea was as follows: Indian hair at 49% (US\$5.2 million), and Indonesian hair at 45% (US\$4.8 million), with no Chinese hair officially entering the ardently anti-communist ROK. (Though rumors suggested that Chinese hair was smuggled in.)⁸⁸

Let's now return to India, and its deal with US wigmaker Fashion Tress. From its founding in 1962, Fashion Tress had promoted itself as European-style wigmaker. A 1966 catalog, for instance, featured a picture of the Eiffel Tower and the Roman Colosseum just inside the cover. Fashion Tress's hand-ventilated wigs were said to be “made by European craftsmen who have learned this art through long years of experience,” while its hand-wefted wigs were sewn on “the finest European netting.” Customers could purchase the “Parisienne” wig or custom wig #201, touted as “the finest wig of its kind in the world,” because “Only the French masters could lend such magic to wiggery.”⁸⁹ But the October 1966 deal shifted much of Fashion Tress's production to India, with hair sourced from South Indian heads, raising a question that befuddled wigmakers around the world: how should they reflect the shift from European hair and production to Asian?

When 1960s wigmakers began to use hair from Asia, they could no longer use the old racial hierarchies, under which Asian hair was so degraded that it was difficult to imagine it in fashion settings. Wigmakers thus worked to develop a new discourse of quality for Asian hair. And, following the template they had long used to promote European hair, they told origin stories that removed Asian hair from market exchange. Their hair stories helped to maintain a transition zone between body and commodity: if hair “producers” were not paid, or were paid below market value, then hair could be sanitized by being transformed into a commodity by middlemen hair merchants. Hair consumers could thereby purchase a fully transformed good, not a body part recently removed from a poor woman's head. A hair buyer who purchased South Korean hair described his warehouse as a “Fort Knox of hair,” cut (of course) from the heads of Korean peasants, or snipped stealthily from the heads of unsuspecting bus riders.⁹⁰ As a reporter summarized it, the hair buyer argued that “Oriental hair is considered technically superior in both body and luster to European hair,” with Korean hair superior to Japanese hair.⁹¹ Indonesian hair had its supporters, too: it became popular after the wig embargo was imposed, and was extolled as “famous in the Orient. It is black, gleaming,

⁸⁸ Kam-Chi Tai, “The Hong Kong Wig Industry: A Study of Its Development and Some of the Major Factors for its Recent Decline,” MBA Thesis, Lingnan Institute of Business Administration, Chinese University of Hong Kong (Jun 1972); Indian Chamber of Commerce Hong Kong, *Industrial Hong Kong: Wigs* (Hong Kong: Indian Chamber of Commerce Hong Kong, 1971); Korea Exchange Bank, “Wig Industry,” *Monthly Review* (Feb 1971), p 4.

⁸⁹ Fashion Tress, *Fashion Tress Professionnelle Catalogue of Wigs, Hairpieces and Accessories* (Hialeah, Florida: Fashion Tress, 1966).

⁹⁰ Korea historian Bruce Cumings notes that when Bob Hope visited US troops in South Korea, he would joke that he was late to the show “because slicky boys” – Korean locals – “stole my landing gear.” Cumings, “Some Thoughts on the Korean-American Relationship,” JPRI Occasional Paper No. 31 (May 2003), accessed at <http://www.jpri.org/publications/occasionalpapers/op31.html>

⁹¹ Shana Alexander, “Hair is terribly personal,” *Life* (14 Oct 1966), p 40.

and of high quality for wig work.” There, hair collectors were said to buy hair for “a handful of chocolates or hard candies.”⁹²

Fashion Tress likewise worked to create a new discourse of quality around Indian hair, though its officials seemed uncertain about how to do so. For example, they considered creating wig names that glamorized the link to India: in November 1966, the company filed trademark applications for wigs to be named “Maharani,” “Maharane,” and “Star of India.”⁹³ But I have found no evidence that these names were ever used, nor have I found ads that tout the use of Indian hair or labor. In fact, a December 1966 Fashion Tress ad failed to mention hair sources or craftsmanship at all – European, Indian, or otherwise – while in 1967, when Fashion Tress made a deal to sell wigs on behalf of Paris fashion house Christian Dior, Fashion Tress produced the high-end wigs in Paris, not in India.⁹⁴

Instead, Fashion Tress President Rowland Schaefer seems to spread news of his Indian connections in interviews in major American newspapers and magazines. Newspaper stories like the one in the *New York Times* exoticized Fashion Tress’s Indian sources, describing a pilgrimage to Tirupati where penitents “squat patiently in rows, men and women separated, while 50 temple barbers in white loincloths shave their heads with flashing steel razors” before visiting “the scowling four-armed god who rules the hill.”⁹⁵

Like the hair offered by Italian nuns at their initiation, or the hair received through barter in South Korea or Indonesia, Indian hair was often depicted in European or American news articles as outside market relations – something traded or offered but not paid for. So on one hand, Indian hair was sacralized, valorized as an offering worthy of a god – helping to justify the high price of a wig made from Indian hair. At the same time, Indian hair was all but worthless, a waste product given up for free or for trinkets. Paradoxically, this depiction could also help wigwearers comprehend its transformation into a luxury, as wholesale hair buyers and retail wig-wearers were cast as connoisseurs, transforming hair into fashion through their ability to perceive value in an apparently worthless item. “[M]y bureau is stuffed with the hair of a thousand Orientals,” one woman confessed in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, commending the wig as a cover-up for nature’s flaws. “I feel occasional pangs of remorse when I picture all those peasants going around half-bald in the hot sun. But it was either them or me,” she said, offering a tongue-in-cheek narrative in which the white consumer seemed to value Asian hair more than its original owner had.⁹⁶ Some Indians struck back, however, turning this logic on its head: an article in Indian magazine *Economic and Political Weekly* noted that Wig India took “what could be termed a ‘waste material’ – the sacrificial offerings of human hair made at many temples all over the South – and by appropriate processing, transform it into a product designed for the most sophisticated markets of the West.”⁹⁷

Indian hair buyers also hoped to increase Indian hair’s value through a direct discourse of racial hierarchy. Some did so by comparing Indian hair favorably to European hair and distancing it from other Asian hair. Thus, in an article promoting the sale of Indian hair to the West German market, trade experts suggested that Chinese hair was so unlike European hair that it needed to be chemically thinned before it could be used. Indian hair, on the other hand, was “in its texture very similar to Italian hair and needs normally only bleaching and dyeing. Moreover, the quality corresponds to European hair so that it is difficult to distinguish it from the other. It is even reported

⁹² Ralph McGill, “It Takes An Awful Lot Of Hair To Supply The Wig Makers,” *Lewiston [Idaho] Morning Tribune*, 27 Dec 1966.

⁹³ Entries for “Maharane” (serial number 72259233), “Star of India” (72259234), and “Maharani” (72259235) at trademarks.justia.com, accessed May 23, 2014.

⁹⁴ Advertisement, *Vogue* (1 Dec 1966), pp 118-19; Angela Taylor, “The Falls of the House of Dior,” *New York Times*, 24 Aug 1967.

⁹⁵ J. Anthony Lukas, “A Wig Maker Finds India Rich in Raw Material,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1966.

⁹⁶ Laura Cunningham, “Why I Wear my False Eyelashes to Bed,” *Cosmopolitan* (Oct 1968), p 48.

⁹⁷ “State Trading Goes to the Head,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (25 Feb 1967), pp 431-32.

that at times the Italian human hair exporters used to sell in the German market Italian hair mixed with more than half Indian hair.”⁹⁸ This is the context in which Fashion Tress’s Schaefer claimed that Indian hair made good wigs “because Indians are basically Caucasians and their hair is soft and fine like Caucasian hair, not brittle and coarse like other Asian hair.”⁹⁹ The irony, of course, is that much (if not most) of the hair used in Fashion Tress’s Indian wigs came from pilgrims to Tirupati who would have been considered Dravidian by earlier anthropologists, not Aryan or Caucasian, and therefore would not have had the sort of hair that early anthropologists surmised was shared by “Indo-Europeans.”¹⁰⁰ Schaefer was perhaps most incisive about hair and race when he observed a similarity among the people who offered their hair around the world, noting that “You get hair where people are poor.” Schaefer argued that while Indonesia was, at the time of the interview, the world’s leader in providing non-communist hair, he believed India would soon take the lead. “I think India will someday become the biggest source of supply because there are more Indians than Indonesians and they are just as poor,” he argued. As Schaefer saw it, when Indians visited temples like Tirupati, it was their very poverty that encouraged them to offer hair: “These people are so poor they haven’t anything to offer except their hair,” he said. “So the priests cut their hair off and sell it.”¹⁰¹

If Schaefer saw India’s hair and wig industry as a sign of poverty, from India’s perspective it was instead evidence of the nation’s growing industrialization. The US\$22.5 million deal was a sign of success for the State Trading Corporation on its face: a signal that India could create an export industry from nothing – and manufacturing products for a fast-moving fashion industry, no less. Wig India also employed more than 800 workers, and was set up to employ many more, allowing STC to claim that it was perhaps the largest wig factory in the world. Pictures from inside the factory reveal utterly orderly conditions: women appear to have worn clean, white uniforms, and often had bandannas around their heads (likely to prevent stray hair from falling into their work). They were arrayed symmetrically, placidly seated in caned chairs, poised either at sewing machines or with needles in hand. Pictures of the men – who were shown doing the work that men did throughout Asia’s wig industry in the 1960s, mainly bleaching and hackling (combing out matted hair) – were more disorderly, but still revealed an open, well-lit workplace.¹⁰²

Throughout the short life of Wig India, the factory was a showcase for Indian industrialization, as foreign visitors traveled to Ambattur to tour the site. In late 1968, US Congressman Robert Taft, Jr., of Ohio visited Wig India as part of a tour of light industry in Ambattur; in mid-1969, US labor activist Esther Peterson, once the highest-ranking woman in the John Kennedy Administration, visited Wig India on an Asian tour arranged by the Richard Nixon Administration to emphasize Nixon’s commitment to workers and labor. Peterson took notes on workers’ wages, health insurance, and

⁹⁸ “West German Market For Indian Wigs And Wiglets,” *Journal of Industry and Trade* (Jul 1969), p 968.

⁹⁹ J. Anthony Lukas, “A Wig Maker Finds India Rich in Raw Material,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1966.

¹⁰⁰ A 1955 article in the temple Bulletin suggested that 1/3 of Tirupati pilgrims came from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, 1/3 from Karnataka, and the remaining 1/3 from North India. “Tirupati-Bangalore Bus Transport Inaugurated,” *Tirumalai-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin* (Jan 1955) p 5. A study of pilgrims who paid for special Arjitha Sevās between June 1966 and May 1967 (essentially major donors) yielded an even stronger “Dravidian” presence: 51% came from Andhra Pradesh, 30% from Madras, 13% from Mysore, and only 6% from North India or outside of India. Subbaramaiah, *Finances of an Indian Temple*, pp 110-12. In 1969, a government official suggested how this translated into hair for wigs, noting that 75% of the hair used in Wig India’s wigs came from Andhra Pradesh, primarily from temple tonsure hair. “Oral Answers to Questions,” *Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Debates*, 22 Aug 1969, p 33.

¹⁰¹ J. Anthony Lukas, “A Wig Maker Finds India Rich in Raw Material,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1966; “The Wig Business,” *Forbes* (15 Sep 1968), pp 33-34.

¹⁰² Images from “India: Gold in the Hills,” *Newsweek* (26 Jun 1967), p 62; papers of Esther Peterson, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University; Donal O’Donovan, “Raw Material from 40 Temples,” *Irish Times*, 26 Jan 1970; N. Ranga Rao, “Indian Wigs Go to the West,” *Times of India*, 16 May 1971; “Hindus and HK firm help India’s shortage of cash,” *South China Morning Post*, 24 Jun 1967; B.B. Gujral, “Wigs – a new line of export,” p 23; PTI, “Largest Wig-Making Unit Is Inaugurated,” *Times of India* (1 Feb 1967).

union dues, but failed to note anything about a strike at the factory only four months before her visit.¹⁰³ (After STC managers failed to increase wages at the factory to align with wage levels across STC companies, workers locked up factory managers and struck for 10 days. Though the director of STC ultimately came down to Madras to negotiate, the main result was that 26 workers were fired for their participation in the strike.)¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the most significant visit was from B.F. Coggan, leader of a United Nations Export Production team, in early 1967. Coggan toured about 200 factories in India in response to a request from Prime Minister Indira Gandhi for help with growing India's exports. Among other recommendations, Coggan suggested that India tighten production and inspection standards to international levels, and learning "the tricks of international salesmanship and marketing" in order to shed its image as an agricultural country. "Let me put it bluntly," Coggan said. "India does not at present have the industrial image. The image is one of a hungry country." Coggan reminded his Indian audience that postwar Japan had been seen as a "junkshop or cheap" producer but had transformed itself into a producer with an image for quality, and stated that he and his team had been pleasantly surprised to find that India had a strong industrial foundation for making the same transition.¹⁰⁵

Coggan's recommendations, and Gandhi's request, dovetailed with a discourse of industrialization popular in Asian countries in the 1960s. Take the South Korean wig industry, for example. South Korea's export wig industry started up in 1962, and surged due the US embargo in 1965. But through into the late 1960s, Hong Kong wig manufacturers still led the wig market, due in part to their reputation for higher-quality production. For a few years after the embargo, South Korea thus followed more standard prescriptions for industrialization: restricting the wig market to established producers; clamping down on inspections; and supporting both an export promotion organization, KOTRA, and an industrial research arm, KIST, to build out the infrastructure for producing goods that met international standards and expectations. But while these measures helped to provide a foundation for successful production, South Korea became the world's #1 wig producer by 1970 less because of these standard measures and more because Korean immigrants to America helped to build a dominant Korean-controlled wig retail network, and because South Korea also benefited from lower wages compared to Hong Kong. Both advantages helped South Korea outlast Hong Kong when margins in the wig industry thinned in the 1970s: while many South Korean wigmakers stuck with the industry until it shook out, Hong Kong wigmakers shifted their capital into higher-margin industries like garments or electronics. The lesson here is to think of Coggan's recommendations not simply as economic advice but also as part of a global discourse on Asian growth and industrialization.¹⁰⁶

The story of Wig India's attempts at growth is similarly complicated. After its two big moves in 1966 – canalizing the Indian export hair and wig trade, and inking a deal with Fashion Tress – Wig India enjoyed a brief year of profitability before falling into deep losses by 1969 and failing by 1975. It would be easy to read Coggan's critiques of broader Indian industrialization efforts onto Wig India, as its partner Fashion Tress and critics in government actually did. Yet critiques from the

¹⁰³ Robert Taft, Jr., *Report of the Special Study Mission to South and Southeast Asia by Robert Taft, Jr., Ohio, of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1969), p 4; Esther Peterson, *Journal [loose leaf pages]*, pp 174-75, Folder 1451, "Trip for State Dept.' 3 of 4," Box 73, MC 450, Papers of Esther Peterson, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

¹⁰⁴ "Demands of Wig India Employees," *Trade Union Record*, 5 March 1970; *Tamil Nadu Labour Journal*, Volume 13, Issues 1-8, p 27.

¹⁰⁵ "UN To Help Indian Exports," *Careers Digest* (Mar 1967), p 58; "Drive to boost exports urged by U.N. team," *Times of India*, 6 Sep 1967; "UN Team Studies India's Export Production," *Indian and Foreign Review*, Vol 4 No 10, p 6; B.B. Gujral, "Wigs – a new line of export," p 25.

¹⁰⁶ Jason Petruslis, "Wig: The Story of a Cold War Commodity," presented at the conference on "The Cold War in Asia," University of Chicago, Apr 2013.

local wigmakers who were hit hardest by canalization offer signal that the story was not so straightforward.

We can start optimistically, with the official inauguration of the Wig India factory on 31 January 1967, at the Ambattur Industrial Estate. Indian Minister for Commerce Manubhai Shah attended and spoke at the opening, citing the factory as a successful part of the government's attempts to build foreign trade and foreign exchange.¹⁰⁷ *Economic and Political Weekly* declared that Wig India's opening "represents a new synthesis of the traditional and ultra-modern," but also noted an "irony": "The raw material originates from simple and complete devotional faith while the finished product is an aid to delicate but deliberate duplicity!" Hopes were high for the factory: backers expected that in 1967, the factory would rake in R. 1 crore in foreign exchange, rising to Rs. 3 crores in the future.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, they predicted that the factory might employ 1,500 workers, almost doubling the workforce in place during 1967; and increase production from about 125 wigs per day to 800-900 wigs per day once the factory had fully trained its workers.¹⁰⁹ "Whether it rains or not, human hair will grow," said STC Chair B.P. Patel. "This is the gold mine India has discovered. We will like to see every beautiful woman in the world wearing an Indian wig."¹¹⁰

To increase its hair stocks (and meet its expected need for hair, once production had ramped up), the Joint Secretary for Commerce, P.C. Alexander, announced the opening of hair collection centers in Kerala, Madras, and Tamil Nadu, and launched a hair recruitment drive in Andhra Pradesh. "Every housewife, and for that matter every woman, can earn some money without having to sweat or toil," noted India's *Enlite* magazine, "and in that course add to the foreign exchange earned by the country." *Enlite* echoed the ministers' description of hair collection as "the commercial exploitation of waste hair," that is, transforming waste into much-needed foreign exchange.¹¹¹

By early 1969, however, *Enlite's* take had changed. In an article titled "Human Hair: STC Failure," the magazine asked why Wig India, once seen as a player in a market with "vast untapped opportunities," "now faces serious problems"? A series of government reports from 1969 decried that Wig India's exports were, as an STC employee attested, "no where near the estimates," with the firm posting a small profit in FY 1967-68, but falling into the red in 1968-69.¹¹²

The reports indicted Wig India on a list of charges. First, it was the fault of Indian workers. The technicians who had been hired by Lion Rock to train Wig India's workers ended up staying much longer than expected, because, as factory managers noted, workers "took a longer period than was anticipated in achieving proficiency in the fabrication of fashion items for a sophisticated market." Murray Robins of Lion Rock had put it more bluntly: "a Hong Kong girl can make a hand-stitched wig in one and a half to two days. An Indian girl takes up to five."¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ PTI, "Largest Wig-Making Unit Is Inaugurated," *Times of India*, 1 Feb 1967.

¹⁰⁸ "State Trading Goes to the Head," *Economic and Political Weekly* (25 Feb 1967), pp 432-33.

¹⁰⁹ B.B. Gujral, "Wigs – a new line of export," p 25.

¹¹⁰ "India: Gold in the Hills," *Newsweek* (26 Jun 1967), p 62.

¹¹¹ Times of India News Service, "Wigs fetch Rs. 1.5 cr. in exchange," *Times of India*, 3 Jun 1967; "Current Topics: Wig Exports," *Times of India*, 6 Jun 1967; "Exports: Hairs Earn Foreign Exchange," *Enlite* (1 Jul 1967), p 24.

¹¹² Comptroller and Auditor-General [India], *Central Government Audit Report (Commercial), 1969* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1969); Committee on Public Undertakings (Fourth Lok Sabha), *Fifty-First Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings (1968-69)*, *State Trading Corporation of India Limited* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1969), pp 30-31; Committee on Public Undertakings (Fourth Lok Sabha), *Fifty-Fourth Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings (1969-70)*, *Action Taken by Government on the Action taken by Government on the Recommendations Contained in the Fifty-First Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1969), pp 7-9; Gupta, *Working of State Trading*, p 166.

¹¹³ "Human Hair: STC Failure," *Enlite* (15 Feb 1969), p 22; "Hindus and HK firm help India's shortage of cash," *South China Morning Post*, 24 Jun 1967.

Bleaching and dyeing were also said to be inferior, as Fashion Tress reported (and STC agreed) that Wig India workers were failing to produce lighter colors of hair.¹¹⁴ An article on the potential for Indian wig sales in West Germany elaborated Indian “deficiencies in the dyeing technique,” with West German consumers demanding 75 shades of hair, especially blond, while Indian technicians could only achieve 25-30 shades.¹¹⁵ Wig India’s managers responded by mobilizing the discourse of global industrialization – here focused on the idea of “standards,” that is, uniformity and commensurability – for their defense, stating, “In...a unit engaged in the production of highly fashionable and sophisticated items it takes sometime (sic) to achieve international standards.”¹¹⁶ In fact, Indian officials had tried to support this kind of learning, as India’s Central Leather Research Institute had taken on the issue of hair processing, publishing articles that addressed grading, fumigation, coloring, and bleaching; but had also warned that low-quality work by exporters could hurt the reputation of India’s wig industry.¹¹⁷ Likewise, aiming to address these concerns, STC imposed tighter export inspections for wigs, while Wig India imposed stronger quality control measures inside the factory.¹¹⁸

This critique of India’s failure to meet international standards fit with the global discourse of industrialization, but it also neglected some important details. Throughout the life of Wig India, local competitors in India and global competitors in the US criticized STC for using standardization as an excuse for monopolizing the industry. We can recall that the Commerce Minister’s deal with Tirupati came soon after a US firm attempted to sign a similar deal with the temple – a competitor who complained regularly to US consuls in India that he had been cut out of the market. And Wig India’s local competitors were even louder in their complaints. As soon as STC announced its deal with Tirupati, small Madras-based hair exporters and wigmakers banded together into the “All-India Human Hair Exporters & Dealers Association,” and lobbied the Ministry of Commerce and STC to end monopolization and re-open Tirupati auctions to private hair dealers.¹¹⁹ Later, when the Government of India tightened its export screening standards, private hair and hairgoods merchants protested again, accusing STC of using inspection screenings and price floors to ensure that Wig India’s exports could not be undercut by competitors. “The fact of the matter is, this export trade was developing all right while it was in the hands of private traders,” *Enlite* opined. “The STC has not worked any wonder in this business but only took over what was already there.”¹²⁰

Further, government reports also laid blame on STC for signing such a large deal with Fashion Tress, because across 1967 and 1968, the US wigmaker slid into bankruptcy, killing off Wig

¹¹⁴ Comptroller and Auditor-General [India], *Central Government Audit Report (Commercial), 1969* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1969), p 73.

¹¹⁵ “West German Market For Indian Wigs And Wiglets,” *Journal of Industry and Trade* (Jul 1969), p 968.

¹¹⁶ Comptroller and Auditor-General [India], *Central Government Audit Report (Commercial), 1969* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1969), p 74.

¹¹⁷ S.K. Barat, “Human Hair, The Pink of Fashion: India can Cater for Sophisticated Markets,” *ISI Bulletin* (Nov 1967), pp 489-91.

¹¹⁸ Committee on Public Undertakings (Fourth Lok Sabha), *Fifty-Fourth Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings (1969-70), Action Taken by Government on the Action taken by Government on the Recommendations Contained in the Fifty-First Report of the Committee on Public Undertakings* (New Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1969), p 9; “Export of Human Hair and Hair Products – Issue of Certification of Origin for Shipment to the U.S.A.,” *Indian Trade Journal* (5 Apr 1967), p A24; “Export (Quality Control and Inspection) Act, 1963: Human Hair Subject to Quality Control and Inspection prior to Export,” *Indian Trade Journal* (12 Jun 1968), pp B524-27; Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, *Survey of India’s Export Procedures & Documents* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, [1970]), pp 63-67 and 169.

¹¹⁹ Memo, to [US] Department of State from Amconsul, MADRAS, INDIA, 24 Aug 1965, Subj: State Trading Corporation Plans For Dominating South India Human Hair Trade.

¹²⁰ Memo, AmConsul Madras (Caldwell) to Department of State, subject “Export of Human Hair and Hair Products from India (Report No. 3),” 14 Jun 1967, folder “STR 9-1 CHICOM, 5/1/67,” Box 1398, RG 59, State Department, NACP; “Human Hair: STC Failure,” *Enlite* (26 Oct 1968), p 22.

India's biggest customer. Early signs of the crash came in September 1967, when Fashion Tress failed to establish a letter of credit per the terms of the deal; and despite a renegotiation of terms, Fashion Tress nevertheless filed for bankruptcy in December 1968. In response, Wig India managers told government auditors that they were attempting to diversify – not only by finding new customers in ten different countries but by selling eyelashes (which used hair too short for wigs). To use the factory's excess capacity, STC even announced that Wig India's factory would make leather uppers for cowboy boots.¹²¹

Finally, as the global wig industry embraced synthetic-fiber wigs starting in 1968, it turned out that human hair was not the mountain of gold it had seemed. In January 1969, only 16% of Hong Kong's wigs were synthetic; five months later, that shot up to 45%; in 1970, it was 84%, and in 1971, it was 86%. And the story was similar in South Korea.¹²² When added to the fact that the US ended its embargo against Chinese hair in 1971, Indian hair exports tumbled, while Wig India's human-hair wigs suddenly seemed overly expensive. ("Chinese hair cannot be better than Indian hair," one Lok Sabha member objected in a lively debate on the hair question. "Perhaps some countries like that," retorted the Lok Sabha Speaker.¹²³)

By 1973, a premature obituary noted that Wig India had already lost Rs. 1.5 crores, and was continuing to pay its remaining 600 workers despite the fact that they weren't making much of anything, not even cowboy boots. (As a last-ditch effort, STC began to sell hair to Japan and West Germany so it could be converted into amino acids, to be used to produce synthetic cloth.)¹²⁴ STC's new chair, for his part, had come to see Wig India as a failed experiment in manufacturing; going forward, he said, STC would stick to trading.¹²⁵

By 1975, Wig India was out of time. In March, a Ministry of Commerce official told Lok Sabha members that the factory had "not been able to show any profit for some time now"; and in June, the *Industrial Economist* reported that Wig India was closing, as "STC was no longer interested in manufacturing wigs."¹²⁶ And it was in November 1975 that the Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams board reached an agreement with official and unofficial temple barbers: going forward, the temple would pay salaries to the barbers, but it would also control revenues from the sale of hair. With STC out of the way and the barbers in the fold, temple revenues from hair sales increased almost 4x between the 1975-76 and 1976-77 fiscal years.¹²⁷

Transforming hair

Oh, mountain of gold! A young man named Ramayya was interviewed at the foot of Tirumala in 1965. "My wife Yadamma was with child," he said. "But the child died in her womb. She had to have an operation. The doctor could not say she would live. I promised Lord Venkateswara that we both would visit him and shave our heads if Yadamma would come out of the

¹²¹ "Written Answers," *Lok Sabha Debates*, 14 Mar 1972, pp 58-59; "Industrial News & Notices: Loan for Wig Factory," *Industrial Expansion*, Volumes 5-9, 1973, p 14; *Annual Report on the Working of Industrial and Commercial Undertakings of the Central Government, 1971-72* (Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1973), p 128.

¹²² Korea Exchange Bank, "Wig Industry," *Monthly Review*, V, 2 (Feb 1971), p 5; "Wash'n Wear Wigs," *Hong Kong Enterprise* (Nov 1968), pp 40-42; Suman Dubey, "Big Wigs from Hong Kong," *Asia Magazine* (19 Oct 1969), pp 8-13; Kam-Chi Tai, "The Hong Kong Wig Industry," p 33.

¹²³ Oral Answers, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 14 Mar 1972, pp 8-10.

¹²⁴ Times of India News Service, "Move for plant to use human hair," *Times of India*, 7 Apr 1975.

¹²⁵ Times of India News Service, "STC's wig-manufacturing venture proves a flop," *Times of India*, 19 Aug 1973.

¹²⁶ Written Answers, *Lok Sabha Debates*, 21 March 1975, p 71; "Wig India," *Industrial Economist* (15 Jun 1975), p 26.

¹²⁷ Bhaskara Venugopal, "Finances of Tirumala-Tirupathi Temples," *Economic and Political Weekly* 13, No. 13 (1 Apr 1978), pp. 571-572.

hospital safe. And she did.” And they did: Yadamma and Ramayya both hiked the 12-mile footpath and offered their hair – all four feet of it, in Yadamma’s case – to Lord Venkateswara.¹²⁸

At the center of this story of hair markets is the idea of transformation: from body part into offering, from offering into commodity, from commodity into foreign exchange, from foreign exchange into raw material into wig, and finally into a bodily extension. And at the center of these transformations was a final transformation: a transformation of self, as pilgrim votaries tonsured to change their lives. One of them wrote:

The successful come to make pious offerings born out of a sense of deep gratitude. Others come praying for favours. It may be true that the finest kind of prayer does not seek gifts from God: but, human nature being what it is, most of us pray making requests of the Almighty. It would be wise, however, to bear in mind the wise man’s word: ‘All my prayers are answered,’ he said, ‘one way or the other.’ We ask and ask: often we do not even know what is good for us.¹²⁹

Though it was sorted and hackled, bleached and dyed, tonsure hair retained traces of the lives it had been offered to transform. Temple officials went to court to argue that these residues of faith meant that hair belonged to the temple, and only the temple. Barbers connected the tradition of tonsure with their own hereditary rights, earned across generations when hair had been offered to Venkateswara. Foreign wigmakers resented its incomplete transformation, demanding discounts when improperly bleached hair retained the dark pigment that emerged from South Indian bodies. US Treasury officials demanded that their customs officers examine the Indian hair imported in Asiatic wigs, claiming that properly trained officers could identify a hair’s political alignment simply by touch. And Venkateswara, even when he did not receive tonsured hair, received the vows and prayers of offering that had produced it. “[W]ho could imagine the types of vows? Venkateswara only knows!”¹³⁰

Messy, flexible, capacious, accretive, recursive markets made it possible for a hair’s biography to persist through every transformation, as each site of exchange offered a new site where a hair could be re-evaluated, its current meaning measured against past meanings. In May 2004, a cross-cultural incident revealed how hair could collapse its many market sites into one. An orthodox rabbi in Israel ruled that wigs made using Indian hair could no longer be worn because the wigs, or *sheitels*, were *tikrovot avodah zarah*, that is, an offering to an idol. This 2004 statement overruled a 1989 rabbinical statement that had allowed the wigs, since back then, it had seemed that hair was tonsured in a non-religious place (outside the temple in the Kalyanakatta) and was shaved to achieve purification rather than as an offering. But in 2004, two delegations were sent to Tirupati to better understand its tonsure practices. They questioned Hindu pilgrims and barbers about how hair was cut and used:

If your intention is to give a present why do you cut it here and therefore have to wait for hours in a queue? Why don’t you cut it at home and send it to the G-d? They answered: No, we want to cut it here because here we are in a holy place. The cutting must take place in a holy place. They were asked: Why do you do it? They answered: Our idol loves our hair. The barbers told them that their intention in cutting the hair is twofold: to earn a good salary and to fulfill their religion. The barbers are of a low caste yet they must belong to the same

¹²⁸ “India: Gold in the Hills,” *Newsweek* (26 Jun 1967), p 62.

¹²⁹ “Pilgrimage to Tirupati: Provision of Facilities,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams’ Bulletin* (Oct 1958; reprint of article in the *Hindu*), pp 25-27.

¹³⁰ P.R. Santhanam, “Pilgrimage to Tirupati,” *Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams’ Bulletin* (Jan 1959), p 21.

religion. Most pilgrims either verbalized or thought the name of their idol before or during the haircut. Everyone has to enter the haircutting building without shoes (including the visiting party!). On top of this building an idol was mounted and in one of the rooms there were further idols.¹³¹

After observing that Tirupati pilgrims removed their shoes to enter the Kalyanakatta, as they did when entering a temple; that pilgrims and barbers often said prayers before or during tonsure; that images of Venkateswara surveyed the tonsure halls; and that some pilgrims considered the hair a holy offering, the rabbi reversed the 1989 ruling and prohibited the use of wigs made using Indian hair. (Essentially, the ruling hinged on whether hair was cut as part of pre-worship purification, and hence OK to use; or whether it was part of an extended non-Jewish religious ceremony, and thus forbidden.) In response to the ruling, some Jews in New York and Israel burned wigs in the street – echoing stories of how Tirupati officials used to destroy the temple’s then-unwanted hair.¹³²

Yet even when cut off and seemingly dead, hair remained alive. Whenever hair entered a new market – at the Kalyanakatta or the godown, at the wig factory or the wig shop – it was a chance to reanimate the hair, resurrecting its old lives alongside new ones. It was because hair had this potential to move that hair could be magical, transforming its users by connecting them across the many places, times, and people hair had touched.

Hair and nails that grow on the body have, down the ages, been endowed with psychic and even mystic powers. They are inextricably linked with magical practices and have been regarded as carrying the personality of the person on whom they grow. The layman does not know the mystic or esoteric explanations for the offering of hair to deities, but by custom and tradition the practice has been handed down from one generation to another.

- Tirumala-Tirupati Devasthanams Monthly Bulletin, 1957

¹³¹ Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Hair, Halakha, and the Theorization of Ritual Practice,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 40, No. 2 (2011), p 216.

¹³² Thomas J. Lueck, “Orthodox Jews in Brooklyn burn banned wigs,” *New York Times*, 17 May 2004; J. Anthony Lukas, “A Wig Maker Finds India Rich Raw Material: Hair of High Quality Plentiful There, American Says,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1966.