

INDIAN  
HAIR  
UNCOVERED

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**It is my professional opinion that 98% of the hair sold worldwide is originally sourced from Indian Temple hair.**

VINCE SELVA

**IT HAS BEEN 13 YEARS** since a group of Orthodox Jewish Rabbis in Israel declared wearing wigs made with even one strand of ritually tonsured hair from India as taking part in idolatry. It was ruled that such wigs were forbidden to be worn. This very dramatic incident was put to rest when the sheitel companies managed to procure raw hair from sources other than India under Rabbinic supervision. This supervision spared Jewish women from the very serious transgression of idolatry through wigs and permitted the use once again.

Unfortunately, recent investigations have exposed that the majority of hair currently being used in the wig and extension industry is and always has been Indian Temple hair. This hair is being bought and re-labeled as European, Brazilian, Mongolian, Russian, Chinese, Peruvian, and Uzbek Hair. The human hair trade is unregulated and has no oversight. Importers, wholesalers, suppliers, manufacturers, and merchants are able to label the hair at their own will. This fuels a lucrative and deceptive industry. Vince Selva is a 75-yr old Indian importer and owner of Indo Asian Human Hair in Inglewood, CA who has been in the hair industry for close to 30 years. "It is my professional opinion that 98% of the hair sold worldwide is originally sourced from Indian Temple hair," Vince says. "Because big money is involved, there are many lies in the industry. China, which is the biggest manufacturer of wigs today, buys their hair in huge quantities from Indian Temples because of the copious supply and reasonable price and then re-label it."

With a population of roughly 1.3 billion people, just over 600 million are women. With those demographics India certainly has the capacity to supply human hair at a global level. According to documentary Hair India, Hindu pilgrims have donated their hair at holy temples throughout Southern India for centuries in an attempt to purify themselves, and repay debt to their gods. As legend has it,

Vishnu — an avatar of God and the Preserver of the World — took out a loan in order to pay for his wedding. But Vishnu's loan was so large that it would take him thousands of years to pay off his debt. Now many devout Hindus help pay off Vishnu's debt by offering the only thing they have: their hair.

**AT THE TEMPLES**, an estimated 700 barbers sit in lines on the concrete floor and tie the women's hair into ponytails before cutting it off. Once the large portions of hair are removed, the barbers use a razor to shave each pilgrims head. On average, each woman donates about 10 oz. of hair. Baskets filled with hair are collected every six hours and stored in a vast warehouse where it is piled knee deep. After temple tonsuring, the hair gets washed by hand in giant baths, then pulled through long beds of spikes by hand to smooth and separate lengths before being tied into neat bundles of 200 strands each. At this stage hair is often chemically soaked to remove pigment to be sold as blonde hair or ready for recoloring.

**BLEACHED AND PIGMENT STRIPPED INDIAN HAIR**

Indian hair is very versatile and hardy. The raw hair can be stripped of pigments to look and feel like natural blonde hair without diminishing its quality. Indian hair is naturally silky and is usually not treated with artificial dyes. The hair is fine and thin, and as stated earlier has a texture similar to European hair. In most cases, the hair has never been subjected to anything more abrasive than coconut oil and herbal soap, and has often never been cut before. The cuticle layers have not been chemically altered and care has been taken to keep roots and tips from running in opposite directions. The hair is of high quality, feels and looks natural, retains dye colors and perms better than other hair. The hair lasts longer through normal wear and tear because the cuticles act as a protective layer for the rest of the fiber.

It's estimated that each year India exports 4,000 tons of temple hair. The hair is sold in yearly auctions. The hair goes to the highest bidders. According to the merchants, one ton of hair is equal to donations from about 3,000 women. Since the shaving ceremony and sale of hair is not limited to one holy site, and 85 percent of the people in India are Hindu, those companies that export India's human hair don't foresee a shortage of temple hair anytime soon.



Swatches of bleached hair



The hair is fine and thin, and has a texture similar to European hair.

# In India

**1.21** Billion Indians  
**85%** Hindus  
**652** Million Women  
**28** Temples

*Tirumala Temple*

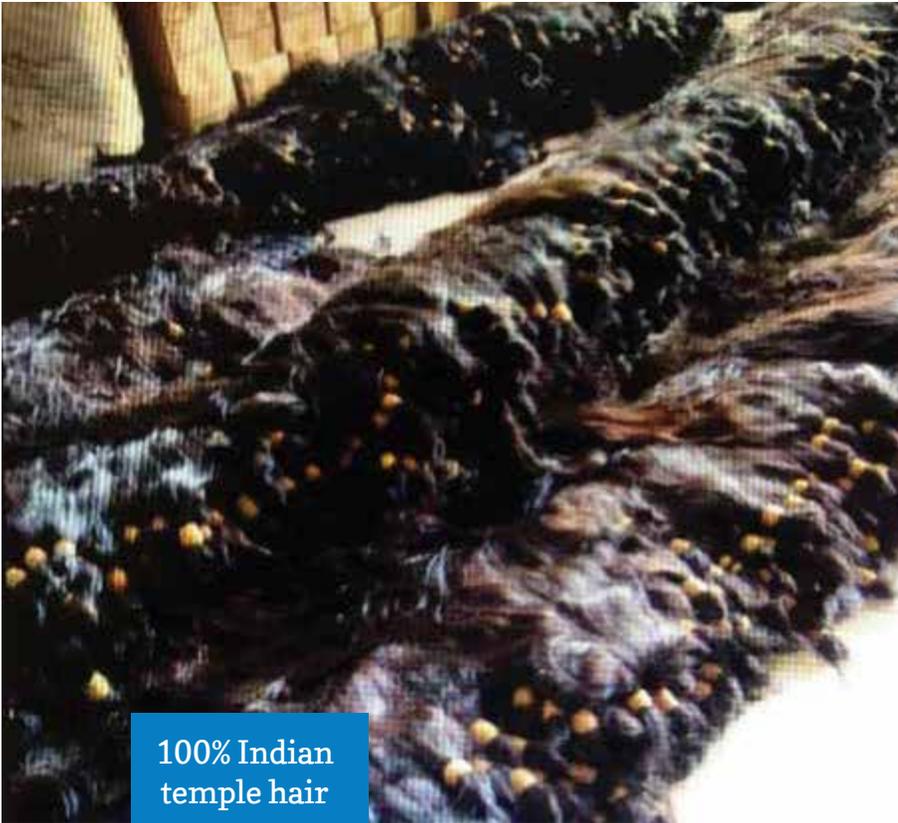
## IN JUST **ONE** OF THE TEMPLES, TIRUMALA:

- ▶ 85,000 heads shaved daily in holiday season, 40,000 otherwise
- ▶ 1,800 barbers in holiday season, 700 otherwise
- ▶ Each barber shaves 60-70 heads during a six-hour shift

**HINDUS PRACTICE TONSURE** (shaving the hair from the head) at least once per lifetime and many perform this ritual multiple times. They typically grow their hair very long and have it ritually shaved as an offering at the temple.

100,000 Indians come daily to the temples to ritually tonsure their hair in order to offer it as a sacrifice to their idol.

The Kalyana Katta is the largest location for tonsures. The pilgrims are required to remove their shoes and leave them outside the tonsure hall. They utter or think the idol's name while receiving their tonsure and they all sit in a prescribed position.



100% Indian temple hair

to adulterate light colored premium quality hair by industrially dyeing it dark. The color will almost always oxidize and will not retain the dark shade for long. Indian hair having similar texture and density to European hair is also naturally dark and will not fade or oxidize the way dyes will. This makes Indian hair extremely preferable for natural dark wigs. Conversely, Indian hair can indeed be bleached to a blonde shade or stripped of all its naturally dark hue and re colored to any shade necessary without diminishing its value or quality. Essentially, Indian hair can easily and efficiently be processed to look and feel almost exactly like European or Russian hair.

Some vendors play tricks on customers by maintaining several seemingly independent websites offering an array of differently labeled hair. One site sells "Russian Hair" and another sells "Other Hair". One company in Dublin, Ireland which sells processed "Made in China" hair, shamelessly advertises it as "Spanish Hair", and then offers the same products as "Russian Hair" on another site. Images of hair supplies in Moscow on yet another site deceive buyers into the belief that this same vendor is selling virgin Russian hair.

### Raw Indian Hair

Do other countries contribute enough measurable supplies of hair to the global market to actually substantiate a labeled claim of European, Brazilian, Russian, Peruvian, or Mongolian hair? Don't they have enough of their own hair supply?!

According to Vince Selva, they may have a very minuscule amount, but nowhere near enough to supply the hair market. "Although there are some women in poor villages who will sell their hair, this is a very small minority, making up about 1% of the hair industry. It's more likely that the agents are being dishonest about the hair's origin." Looking more closely at the "European" and "Russian" hair markets it is logical to conclude that hair isn't freely donated, thus the supply much smaller and more costly than Indian Temple hair. It is also important to note that Ukrainian and Russian hair is usually lighter in shade than Indian hair which is almost entirely dark brown to black in color. European women don't generally have naturally black hair, making it almost impossible to have large supplies of naturally dark hair available to the market. Industrial dyes may be used to darken blonde hair into mid brown hair, however it would be illogical

### Great Lengths

With so many long wigs readily available at reasonable prices on the Jewish market today, it should raise questions as to where a large enough supply of such long hair comes from. As mentioned, Indian women generally keep their hair very long and refrain from cutting it except for ritual sacrifice purposes. This ensures a steady supply of free and long hair to the temple for auction to the hair industry. Where in the world other than India can a supplier find consistently long hair at consistent pricing? A European woman selling her hair would not shave her head to do so. Therefore she would still need to retain at least 10"-12" of her own hair after cutting to maintain hair on her own head. One can reasonably conclude that in order to successfully make a standard long wig of 16"-24" ( with an additional 3" for processing) a woman would have to have hair to her mid thigh before cutting it. Hair grows at about 1/4"- 1/2" a month. At that rate it would take approximately 8 years to grow hair long enough for the fashionable wigs of today. Furthermore it is important to note that one wig requires an average of hair from five women. An average of five women growing their hair for approximately



Snapshot of kosher certified hair, sold as "European Hair"

8 years for one wig suggest the need for tremendous amounts of a constant hair supply in order to keep up with just the Jewish wig niche of the market. The only logical source for enough hair at those lengths and quantities would be from India.

### Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow

Where does all of the hair go once purchased by global buyers for wig production? Are wigs made locally in the country of origin? Nearly all wigs in the Jewish market are processed and sewn into a cap by Chinese factories. These factories produce wigs efficiently and at low costs. They have the best processing tools, cheap labor, and an eagerness to please the customer. These factories also operate almost entirely free of regulation or supervision. They have been known to provide false labeling in their products origin, and switching or diluting hair shipments from customers with their own cheaper, processed, and unwanted hair. Since Chinese factories buy an enormous quantity of Indian temple hair, it is highly likely that many Chinese manufactured wigs contain Indian hair. A customer sending their own virgin hair to China, should highly suspect that the virgin hair may be mixed with unidentified (Indian temple hair) or missing completely. There is no guarantee that hair will not be tampered with. It is nearly impossible to say with certainty if a wig is free of Indian hair. Relying solely on the word a trusted supplier isn't enough. Aside from the possibility of the supplier providing misleading information, the manufacturers also have to be trusted implicitly. According to investigators, the only possible way to verify with complete certainty the origin of hair in any given wig is to watch the process first-hand from step A to Z. This would require a constant watch from the moment the hair is cut from the head, washed, cleaned, separated, and bundled. Then with hair in hand at all times travel to China to oversee the coloring, silicone coating, blending, wefting, ventilating, and packaging process. Such a venture would be extremely arduous and cost prohibitive. Therefore the wig industry relies solely on "trusting" the supplier and manufacturer to deliver a product free of all Indian hair. Without a regulatory and supervision system, this creates open opportunity for corruption. Furthermore, once hair is colored, silicone coated, and blended it is nearly impossible for even an expert or Mashgiach to

ascertain the country of origin. Wig brands and kosher supervisors who proclaim that their wigs do not contain any Indian hair whatsoever may be victims themselves of dishonesty and misrepresentation. While they may have very good intentions, they are most likely being duped from the very beginning by a corrupt industry! The exploitation begins at the source. The Indian hair is being labeled and sold as European, Russian, Mongolian, Brazilian, Peruvian, Uzbek, and Ukrainian hair from the suppliers. The wig companies believe they are not buying any Indian hair, however what they may not realize is that the "Brazilian Hair" and "European Hair" they are buying is most likely coming from the Indian temples! The Kosher supervision and Kosher certification may therefore be very questionable. Telling consumers that a wig is Kosher based solely on the hair having been bought in Europe isn't sufficient and is problematic. Since a large majority of the hair supply in Europe is intentionally mislabeled Indian hair, the wig companies themselves don't really know the origin of the hair they are buying. Saying "we buy only European hair," cannot and does not constitute a Kosher certification.

### Ask the Expert: What's the Difference Between Brazilian & Indian Hair?

“ 99% of the time Brazilian hair, Peruvian Hair or Malaysian hair is actually hair from India or China that has been processed. For instance, when I go to India I am often buying large amounts of hair alongside Brazilians who purchase the curly Indian hair and process it with steam to deliver tighter curls and remarket it as Brazilian hair with a premium price tag put on it. Malaysian hair is often Chinese Hair blended with Indian Hair for sleeker and shinier appearance. Give me a country and I could go on and on; but I won't”

*Dafna Nya Smith,  
Owner and Creative Director  
for Sunny's Hair & Wigs*



# Tirumala's gleaming scalps spell shining prospects for hair business

TONSURING TO PLEASE THE LORD IS A CENTURIES-OLD RITUAL AT THIS VAISHNAVITE TEMPLE.

By: **GS Radhakrishna**

This season we achieved a 45% hike in tonsuring, an all-time record! Around 5,000 people could be tonsured in one shift of six hours. During festivals, the number goes up to about 45,000 heads per day.

Head to the famous temple at Tirupati in Andhra Pradesh and you are likely to find a lot of bald men and women, propitiating Lord Balaji with a vow of tonsure. Gleaming scalps are everywhere, some smeared with sandalwood to keep the head cool, especially in the summer heat.

Tonsuring to please the Lord is a centuries-old ritual at this Vaishnavite temple. As devotees flocked to shear their locks for divine intervention, the management of the temple realized that there was money to be spun from these tresses.

In the past two years, the temple management, the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), has unleashed corporate processes to cash in on the global demand for human hair. Cash registers were ringing during Brahmotsavam at Tirumala, a nine-day festival held every October. This year's Brahmotsavam saw 1,500 barbers, including 277 women, working round the clock to shave off the pates of 3.4 lakh devotees, of which 1.7 lakh were women.

"This season we achieved 45% hike in tonsuring, an all-time record," says Sri Venkataiah, deputy executive officer of the Kalyana Katta, the massive tonsuring platform at the hill shrine of Tirumala. "One of every two devotees who came to Tirumala for the Brahmotsavam offered the hair," he says. A total of seven lakh (700,000) devotees visited the temple for the event this October.

The credit for the bumper offering of hair to Lord Balaji goes to the initiatives by TTD's executive officer, Sambasiva Rao, and KS Srinivasa Raju, joint executive officer. Understanding the potential of the sale of

hair, Rao introduced various measures that have made tonsuring easy for devotees. In collaboration with Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), TTD has introduced online tokens. The platforms for tonsuring play soothing, devotional music while television sets beam mythological movies and bhajans. CCTVs have been put in place to ensure that devotees are not cheated by cut-throat barbers.

Since the commencement of the Brahmotsavam this year, the TTD also provides breakfast for devotees awaiting tonsuring at the Kalyana Katta. The main Kalyana Katta has been turned into an air-conditioned hall. Around 5,000 people could be tonsured in one shift of six hours. There are three other mini Kalyana Kattas. "The platforms are cleaned every two hours and the hair is sent for washing and drying," says a TTD official overseeing the Kalyana Katta.

The revenue generated from tonsuring is hair-raising. It crossed Rs200 crore in 2012. That was when bulk auctioning of human hair was done once in six months to selective bidders. TTD officials have now woken up to the potential of online auctions every month. In 2011, when TTD began e-auctioning of human hair, it sold 1,578 tonnes for Rs618 crore. This massive sale was of hair that had been stored for two years and the backlog flew off the shelves. The biannual e-auctions in 2015-16 yielded Rs200 crore, with monthly auctioning done at MSTC (Metal Scrap Trading Corporation, a small Kolkata-based PSU). "What was just a whiff of income has now skyrocketed to 15-18% of the annual revenue of TTD," says a senior TTD official.

## Bang for the Bucks

India is one of the biggest players in the human hair industry and its annual exports are about 4,000 tonnes (8,818,490 lbs), earning \$800 million annually, according to the commerce ministry. China is the biggest importer of human hair, followed by Brazil, Hong Kong, Italy and the US. The Tirupati Hair has become a major brand in the global hair trade circuits and hair extensions made



of Tirupati Hair are sought after.

On average, around 35,000 heads are shaved every day at Tirumala, yielding almost 500 kilograms of hair. Each barber is trained to shave 60-70 heads during a six-hour shift. During festivals, the number goes up to about 45,000 heads per day. An estimated 12 million devotees go for tonsuring at the hill temple, say TTD officials. Five years ago, tonsuring cost the devotee a fee of Rs10. In 2011 it was made free of cost — this was because the TTD began to take the sale of hair seriously and projected it internally as a major source of revenue, after collections from hundi, sale of darshan tickets, laddoos and

accommodation charges.

The TTD has also ensured that hair is harvested in a hygienic manner. Every devotee is given a fresh blade and a tablet of sandalwood paste with the tonsuring token. Barbers are given antiseptic solutions.

The hair collected in Tirumala is cleaned and dried at controlled temperatures and stored in categorised bins at a warehouse in Tirupati. It is broadly divided into six grades, depending on the length and texture. Remy hair, which is long and uniformly trimmed, has a big market in Europe and the US, where it is woven into wigs.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

**India is one of the biggest players in the human hair industry and its annual exports are about 4,000 tonnes, earning \$800 million annually.**

### Daily activity in Chennai, leading exporting port of India Nov 26, 2016

Date	HS Code	Product Description	Foreign Country	Foreign Port	India Port	Value(INR)	Value(USD)	Std Qty	Std Unit	Qty	Unit	Mode
26-Nov-2016	67030010	HUMAN HAIR	United States Of America	New York	Delhi Air	3287.9	49	1	Nos	1	Pcs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	100% HUMAN HAIR PRODUCTS 08" - 24"	Netherlands	Amsterdam	Hyderabad Air	68778.9	1025.02	1.67	Kgs	1.67	Kgs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	16" BODYWAVY HUMAN HAIR WEFT	United States Of America	San Francisco	Madras Air	35418.7	527.85	1	Kgs	1	Kgs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	100% HUMAN HAIR PRODUCTS 10" - 28"	Switzerland	Zurich	Hyderabad Air	666515	9933.16	15.63	Kgs	15.63	Kgs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	12" BODYWAVY HUMAN HAIR WEFT	United States Of America	Atlanta	Madras Air	4674.49	69.66	0.2	Kgs	0.2	Kgs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	HUMAN HAIR	United States Of America	New York	Delhi Air	9394	140	2	Nos	2	Pcs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	16" BODYWAVY HUMAN HAIR WEFT	United States Of America	Atlanta	Madras Air	3541.28	52.78	0.1	Kgs	0.1	Kgs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	HUMAN HAIR	United States Of America	New York	Delhi Air	6441.6	96	1	Nos	1	Pcs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	100% HUMAN HAIR PRODUCTS 14" - 26"	Italy	Milano	Hyderabad Air	1606100	23935.95	38	Kgs	38	Kgs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	HUMAN HAIR	United States Of America	New York	Delhi Air	7112.6	106	2	Nos	2	Pcs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	HUMAN HAIR	United States Of America	New York	Delhi Air	6575.8	98	2	Nos	2	Pcs	Air
26-Nov-2016	67030010	16" BODYWAVY HUMAN HAIR WEFT	United States Of America	Atlanta	Madras Air	7932.47	118.22	0.2	Kgs	0.2	Kgs	Air

SOURCES: www.infodriveindia.com

**China is the biggest importer of INDIAN hair, followed by Brazil, Hong Kong, Italy and the US.**



There is no shortage of long hair to supply the wig industry.

# Russian Hair Company®



The supply of real Russian hair is not sufficient for an industrial coloring

You can find websites with most ridiculous hair products advertised as "Russian Hair". Be careful with vendors who sell "Mercedes" and "Yugo" on the same lot, you might find "Yugo" parts in your new "Mercedes". Mixing "Mercedes" and "Yugo" parts makes an "affordable Mercedes". If a vendor sells "Remy" hair and "Russian" hair, most likely all of it is just a processed "Indian Temple" hair.

Why it's not Russian hair? Because the supply of natural, real Russian hair is extremely limited, so it is impossible to color process it in the industrial way similar to huge quantities processing of Indian/Asian hair. Not to mention that during the color processing there is a 30% loss of hair. Imagine the cost of the final product if that would be real natural Russian hair industrially color processed? Only cheap hair in huge quantities can be acid processed and colored that way. Besides, why would someone process and pre-color

this very limited, precious, most expensive natural Russian hair if the only reason why it is so expensive is because the availability of this hair in its natural state is extremely limited. Vendors who sell real Russian hair would never pre-color it before the customer evaluates the hair in its natural condition. The supply of real Russian hair is not sufficient for an industrial coloring and the cost of such process with already very expensive raw hair cost would be astronomical. That is why well-known hair extensions corporations with retail or "via hairdresser classes" distribution systems simply don't carry real natural Russian hair, although they are pretending to. So, if you see someone offers pre-colored "Russian Hair", you can be sure that the hair you will get is not real Russian hair.

Real natural Russian hair is so expensive and rare for a reason - it supposed to be 100% natural at the start point.

## Great Lengths®

Up to four tons (8,000 lbs) of raw hair arrives in Nepi, near Italy's capital, from India every month. Here the hair undergoes very time consuming and elaborate processes, primarily by hand, to ensure hair is treated as gently as possible.

This requires specially trained employees for the hair bundles to become the extensions women around the world are delighted to have added to their hair.

Before immersing the hair in the osmosis bath for 10 to 20 days for depigmentation, workers sew each strand to white strips of fabric to ensure the cuticles of the hair all follow the same direction during subsequent production steps.

No other genetic structure is as similar to European and North American hair as that of Indian hair. Asian hair, for example, is noticeably thicker. To modify it to the texture of our hair, the surface would need to be treated with acid. The consequence: The cuticles are destroyed; the natural shine as well as the elasticity and resilience are lost.

The secret of the composition of the osmosis baths which gently remove the hair pigments from the raw hair in 15 to 20 days is guarded similarly to the Coca Cola formula.

Only a few Great Lengths employees know the actual recipe which eliminates treating the surface of the hair with chemicals, which would damage the outer texture, i.e. the cuticles. Instead, osmosis baths slowly, hence very gently, remove the dark color pigments from inside the hair.

This gentle process – without any harsh chemicals – preserves the natural cuticles of the hair. And so the hair also keeps the shine and the elasticity of high-quality extensions.

The time the hair remains in the bath essentially depends on the desired color: The lighter the extensions, the longer they undergo depigmentation.

*Great Lengths®*



The raw hair can be stripped of pigments to look and feel like natural blonde hair without diminishing its quality.

# The surprising source of some celebrities' hair extensions

BY NINKA MBAYE AND HUIZHONG WU @CNNMONEY

**AT A SMALL TEMPLE IN CHENNAI, INDIA, DOZENS OF HINDU WOMEN SIT ON WOODEN CHAIRS, WAITING FOR THEIR HAIR TO BE SHAVED.** It's an act of complete devotion to their gods, and the first step in an extraordinary journey that sees their long, dark locks woven into the hair of women thousands of miles away.

Each year, the Sri Bhavani Amman Temple collects more than three tons of hair from the heads of pilgrims. At one time the hair was burned, but these days it's put to a more pragmatic use: It's sold to processing plants, which treat it then export it around the world.

The open secret to some celebrities' full, lustrous hair is that it's not always their own. And the trend for celebrities to wear hair extensions has helped grow the global market for wigs and weaves.

## Multimillion dollar trade

Extensions can be made from synthetic hair, but many salons use human hair because it can be lightened and heat treated. Global exports of human hair are dominated by China and Russia, but Indian hair has a reputation for quality and its exports are worth \$300 million a year.

Selling hair earns the Sri Bhavani Amman temple \$150,000 a year, and this is only a fraction of the millions that larger temples earn. Devotees don't receive any money; they are instead rewarded with food and religious serenity.

"The temple cannot have [the hair] lying around and we can't just throw it out in the dustbin," explained Anjan Lokamitra, the temple's managing trustee. Instead, at the end of the year the hair is sorted and auctioned to the highest bidder.

"Companies come from different places and they bid for it, and those funds are used [for the] temple in terms of various buildings that we are planning in the next two years," said Lokamitra.

There are so many women who shave their heads at temples that hundreds of hair processing factories have emerged in Chennai.

Among them is Shanmuga. Here, dozens of workers meticulously disentangle, categorize, delouse, wash, dry and color the hair.

Around 1,000 kilograms of hair are processed by hand each month. Weaves are sold for \$500 per kilo; extensions go for \$900 per kilo. The factory's annual turnover is close to \$3 million.

"Indian hair is somewhat similar to European hair in texture," said Murali Krisna, CEO of Shanmuga. "It's not as hard as the Chinese but not as soft as European. So when we prepare hair extensions, the final product exactly matches with European hair."

Different countries favor different styles, said Jyothi Krsna, Shanmuga's managing director of quality control. "In France, people like straight hair and they want extensions mainly," she said. "In other countries like South Africa and America, they like curly hair. Curly is for the African market, straight is for European market. The American market is cosmopolitan -- they like all the textures."

## Blonde ambition

Shanmuga targets its offerings accordingly, exporting a third of its hair to Asia and a fifth to the United States. But its biggest market is Europe, where it sells through retail partner Hair Luxury, based in Paris.

"The biggest market and the biggest customer in Europe is Italy," explained Remi Chinta, CEO of Hair Luxury. "And now we are trying to expand also in Norway, in Sweden, for all the blonde extensions because there is a big demand for blonde extensions there." Shanmuga specializes in dyeing its hair blonde. Hair Luxury can sell the hair for more than \$2,000 a kilo. Its customers are hairdressers, like Paris-based Ebtissen Tekouri. She buys the hair every three to four months both for her clientele and her own personal use. She pays \$360 for a bundle -- around 150 grams.

"I love using this hair on my head because of the length and the quality," said Tekouri.

Her salon is a long way from Chennai, and the women whose hair she wears on her head.

"When you buy it and it is beautifully packaged you forget that this hair was once someone else's," she said. "You don't see the background story, you only see what is here in front of you."



B.K. Murali Krisna, CEO of Shanmuga

# Shear devotion: The barbers of Tirupati

HEAD TONSURING AT TIRUMALA VENKATESWARA, ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST VISITED PLACES OF WORSHIP, IS A TURNING POINT IN THE LIVES OF MILLIONS. ROSHNI NAIR TALKS TO ITS BARBERS TO GET A SENSE OF THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES



**DNA**  
DAILY NEWS & ANALYSIS

Eight years before his death in 2012, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv left many scampering for synthetic wigs. Israel's arbiter of Jewish law had, in 2004, banned wigs made from Indian tresses. The hair was associated with idolatrous Hindu rites, he said, making it off-limits for Orthodox Jews. Most women from the community, who'd use hairpieces to cover their hair out of modesty, then opted for synthetic products after burning the real hair wigs.

But the edict created no dent in the business of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), the trust managing approximately 28 temples in India. Almost all TTD temples offer chudakarana (hair tonsuring) services, but the jewel in the crown – Tirumala Venkateswara temple – fetches Rs.250-275 crore from annual e-auctions of hair donated by devotees. On June 12 alone, a whopping 85,518 heads were shaved at Kalyanakatta, a building outside the temple dedicated solely for the purpose. Although thousands are also tonsured at TTD's guesthouses, Kalyanakatta is perhaps ground zero of the global wig industry, its gears oiled by the likes of M. Subba Rayudu.

"Around 80 on holy days, weekends and the holiday season. 40 otherwise," says Rayudu, referring to his daily workload. The second-generation barber has tonsured heads at Tirumala for three years running. Before that, he had his own salon. "But unke pita ka late ho gaya," chips in Rayudu's brother-in-law T Siva Kumar, alluding to the demise of the former's father, who'd worked there for 34 years. Rayudu was then absorbed into the Kalyanakatta fold as permanent TTD employee.

Head tonsuring at Tirumala is an epoch-making event in the lives of millions, a metamorphosis upon having a wish fulfilled, a miracle witnessed, a loved one pass away or the ego tamed. And the barbers are central, yet largely overlooked in this narrative.

Reports peg the number at around 600 full-timers, but Rayudu estimates that the total workforce is some 1,800 strong – of which around 700 are permanent and the rest, 'piece-rate' (part-time) and sevak (volunteer) barbers. While piece-rate employees work six-hour shifts, Rayudu – a full-timer – works eight hours, seven days a week for 15 days a month. The first shift kicks off at 2 a.m. before Suprabhatam seva or the first aarti (2.30-3.00a.m.), and the last at midnight.

Siva Kumar's father worked 15 years at the temple as a piece-rate barber. Back in the day, the rate was Rs.2 per person, he informs. Today, it's Rs.7 for a full tonsure and Rs.3 for a partial one. All barbers must wear white sampradaya vastra or traditional clothing and a tilakam on the forehead. And only those from the Nayee Brahmin (a term sometimes used interchangeably with Nai) caste can work at TTD temples. Barbers from other castes won't find a way in.

The skill of the temple barber lies not just in big tonsure counts. It's about being able to do clean mundans of wailing, flailing tots. A nick is like a teacher's red ink on one's report card – particularly in the case of infants aged 3-9 months as their scalps are tender. "It can be tough," Rayudu smiles. "Children get agitated, so we don't rush if parents have a hard time holding them still." Dealing with senior citizens and the differently-abled too can be challenging, he says. Although they form separate queues for darshanam (worship), there's no such provision at the Kalyanakatta. Their fatigue, as also that of thousands who spends hours in the queue, makes them cranky and irate. Because of the swelling numbers, the barbers' lunch break lasts barely 10 minutes.

A job as demanding as this is bound to have repercussions. Being constantly seated and having no breaks after overworking the arms results in sore legs, wrists, shoulders and a bad back. "But you get used to it. In fact you can't use a barber chair after shaving heads this way. What takes several minutes in a chair is done in half the time here," Rayudu stresses.



# Brazil & South America are saturated with Indian hair too

There is only one company in the world dispensing a hechsher on human hair for the use in wigs. Several years ago, this company located in Israel, ascertained that it is extremely difficult to source authentic European and Russian hair because of an incredibly small supply of raw hair indigenous to the region. Therefore, this hechsher company began sourcing its hair from Brazil and neighboring South American countries under the notion that the copious supply of hair found there was authentic South American hair unmixed with Indian hair.

Approximately 10 years ago, a prominent Jewish Brazilian businessman initiated a venture in the wholesale human hair trade with the intent of supplying the Jewish market with "kosher certified" 100% non Indian hair. This businessman quickly determined through market insiders and hands on research that Brazil was completely saturated with Indian hair. It was close to impossible to secure large amounts of hair verifiably free of Indian hair. Rabbi Serial Rosenberg, Raave" of Bais-din Bnei Brak, worked closely with this businessman to determine a viable way to obtain totally authentic South American hair and provide a reliable hechsher. Rabbi Rosenberg determined that it was impossible to prove the origin of the hair therefore making it impossible to dispense a hechsher. At another opportunity, the businessman asked R' Landau of Bnei Brak to supply a hechsher. Rabbi Landau, who was in Argentina at the time for other kashrus transactions, traveled to Brazil to inspect the human hair market. After laborious and intense research, Rabbi Landau adamantly refused to give a hechsher on the grounds of the market being flooded with Indian hair in a most unscrupulous fashion. He would take no part in overseeing a kosher certification in such a corrupt market. It was impossible to certify any hair "kosher" in South America.

Much of South American hair is sourced from Paraguay, a country bordering Brazil.



Dark Indian hair is processed into every possible shade



The following is a snapshot from the Indian customs - India exports hair to Paraguay and to 55 other countries.

#	Date	Indian Part	CTH	Description	Quantity	UQC	Unit USD	Total Value USD	Destination Part	Country
1	01-Nov-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn	100	605	615.35	61535.39	asuncion	paraguay
2	01-Nov-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn	100	605	606.91	60691.30	asuncion	paraguay
3	01-Nov-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn	80	605	639.40	51151.20	asuncion	paraguay
4	19-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	15	605	492.55	7388.18	asuncion	paraguay
5	19-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	15	605	453.91	6808.72	asuncion	paraguay
6	19-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	80	605	605.63	48451.78	asuncion	paraguay
7	18-Aug-2016	delhi air cargo	67030010	"remy human hair-"a" grade size 16"-28"	126.5	605	532.83	67339.75	asuncion	paraguay
8	02-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	100% indian human hair,natural virgin, washed and cleaned in different sizes,colour black cartons made of cardboardpack	30	605	524.86	15741.86	asuncion	paraguay
9	02-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	100% indian human hair,natural virgin, washed and cleaned in different sizes,colour black cartons made of cardboardpack	20	605	694.53	13890.56	asuncion	paraguay
10	02-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	100% indian human hair,natural virgin, washed and cleaned in different sizes,colour black cartons made of cardboardpack	70	605	655.74	45901.91	asuncion	paraguay
11	02-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	100% indian human hair,natural virgin, washed and cleaned in different sizes,colour black cartons made of cardboardpack	70	605	602.26	42008.09	asuncion	paraguay
12	02-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	100% indian human hair,natural virgin, washed and cleaned in different sizes,colour black cartons made of cardboardpack	50	605	629.69	31494.27	asuncion	paraguay
13	02-Aug-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	100% indian human hair,natural virgin, washed and cleaned in different sizes,colour black cartons made of cardboardpack	40	605	623.02	24922.90	asuncion	paraguay
14	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -grey hair	10	605	665.06	6650.58	asuncion	paraguay
15	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -grey hair	80	605	621.83	5054.83	asuncion	paraguay
16	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -grey hair	10	605	688.99	6889.90	asuncion	paraguay
17	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	10	605	689.95	6899.46	asuncion	paraguay
18	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	80	605	651.52	52124.58	asuncion	paraguay
19	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	80	605	609.49	48764.56	asuncion	paraguay
20	01-Jul-2016	chennai air cargo	67030010	human hair remi single drawn -black hair	20	605	626.63	12532.62	asuncion	paraguay

# Indian Hair Hoax

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THE HUMAN HAIR TRADE IS A GROWING, AND VERY LUCRATIVE INDUSTRY

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By: Vince Selva

**THE HUMAN HAIR TRADE** is a growing, and very lucrative industry. With sales exceeding 12 billion dollars a year, customers should look out for scams and unethical manufacturers and suppliers. My name is Vince Selva. I am a Los Angeles based hair importer sourcing hair from three locations in INDIA. (a) Hindu Temples (b) Christian Churches, (c) Direct Donors at Village level. The hair from the Hindu Temples and the Christian churches are bought directly from the sources by contracting direct with them or buying from those who have contracted with them. The village level is more labor intensive, expensive and it is difficult to harvest a consistent predictable quantity. I am the owner of the Indo Asian Human Hair Int. Inc. in Inglewood, Calif., and IndoHair.Com and I've been in the industry for nearly two decades. Originally from South India, I began my career as an importer of wholesale raw hair. I began selling retail about thirteen years ago. We started

manufacturing many products with the temple hair. This includes Wefted Hair, Wigs, partials, closures, 360 and so on. We also sell Raw human hair from direct donors to the temples and sellers at village level. Raw and processed hair is a billion-dollar industry saturated with scams and corruption. People ask me – Where does the majority of hair for wigs and extensions come from today? The only place in the world that has organized commercial quantities of hair is from India where approximately 617 million women ritually donate to the Hindu temple or the Christian Churches. Hindu pilgrims have donated their hair in ritual purification for centuries. It's a symbol of religious devotion and surrender of the ego. All of this hair has become an extraordinary economic resource for the temple and its custodians. There is no shortage of free hair from the pilgrims for the temples to auction off to exporters. It's simple economics, supply and demand. Indian temples have a huge free supply of "sacrificed" hair, and the world has a huge demand. For wholesalers, it makes the most sense to buy where the supply is high and the price is reasonable. It would be impossible for enough hair to be cut in European countries to provide for the world. There are some temples around the world that shave hair like the huge ones in India. Some of these countries are Indonesia, Bangladesh, etc. However, the volume from

these countries is miniscule in comparison to India. There are women in Europe that cut their hair to sell for a price, but again this is a very small minority and it would never provide enough hair for all the wigs being sold on the market today.

The hair in wigs labeled "European Hair" or "Asian Hair," most likely all contain hair from India and are being fraudulently labeled. Other labels include Mongolian Hair, Brazilian Hair, Peruvian Hair, and Uzbek Hair. It is impossible to know where the hair is coming from or





# Indo

## HAIR

to trace the origin of all the hair since advanced processing techniques disguise the natural feel and look of the hair, and often may destroy all recognizable DNA. Another industry known secret is that hair which comes from Russia may at times come from cadavers. There is no way of knowing if the hair came from a live person or a dead one.

China, which is the biggest manufacturer of wigs today, buys their hair in huge quantities from Indian Temples because of the copious supply. Even hair purchased from Europe is often sourced from India. Because big money is involved, there are many lies in the industry. I personally know people in Los Angeles who buy Indian hair and then sell them to Jewish businessmen claiming the hair is “kosher” and is from European countries. People have even advised me to lie about the origin of the hair from India, as this would financially benefit my company. Unfortunately, this is the norm in the industry and I refuse to take part in this.

It is my professional opinion that 98% of the hair sold worldwide is originally sourced from Indian Temple hair. The Temples have become an extremely efficient source of hair. Tirupati is the richest Indian temple. Here, tens of thousands of people donate their hair. There are huge rooms where hundreds of pilgrims are shaved at the same time in a sort of assembly line. They want to make a sacrifice to God and wouldn't take any money for it. Indian hair is considered the best stand in for European hair in the market for its quality and length. Indian women take exceedingly good care of their hair and don't use any chemicals, bleaches, or dyes. They wash and comb it frequently, curl the ends with their fingers, and use coconut oil on their hair for nourishment. They generally keep their hair long. There were instances when I have received and sold 42” hair. The long hair and extra curly hair is now becoming more expensive and rare as the demand for it rises. After a customer purchases hair, they then usually send it to China or Europe for wig, extension, toupe's and to manufacture an array of other products required by the hair industry. The most popular destination being China as they

posses the skills and mass low wage labor. Once the hair is out of the supplier's hands it becomes a matter of immense trust between supplier and manufacturer. The trust factor with most Chinese manufacturers is very low. They are known to switch the supplier's hair for their own

lesser quality, processed, or unidentified hair. This has been my general experience over the years.

I would like to reiterate the basic economic principles relevant in the hair trade, supply and demand. India has a huge supply of free quality hair, and the world is currently demanding large quantities of hair for wigs and extensions. Most hair used in wigs today has originated in India, and are not labeled as such.

*Vince Selva*

Indo Asian Human Hair Int.Inc.  
355 East Manchester Blvd  
Inglewood, California 90301

**I would like to reiterate the basic economic principles relevant in the hair trade, supply and demand.**

### In conclusion, I'd like to highlight the following:

- 1 98% of all human hair in the world originates from Indian hair. That includes all colors, dark hair, light hair, as well as color treated blonde hair.
- 2 With a population of roughly 1.3 billion people, of which just over 600 million are women, India certainly has the capacity to supply human hair at a global level.
- 3 There are no regulations whatsoever in the hair industry. Thus, many countries will re-label Indian hair as their own, and that includes: Russia, Europe, Brazil, Peru, China, Bolivia, Malaysia, Italy, Indonesia, Ukraine, and many more.
- 4 Once hair has been processed, no expert can tell where the original hair has come from. There's no way to feel the hair, and ascertain its origin.
- 5 Most wigs are processed in China. The Chinese manufacturers operate within a market which lacks oversight or regulation. They have been known to provide false labeling in their products, and hair switching. China buys an enormous amount of Indian temple hair. A customer sending their own virgin hair to China, should highly suspect that the virgin hair may be mixed with unidentified (Indian temple hair). There is no guarantee that hair will not be tampered with.
- 6 Although there are some women in poor villages who will sell their hair, this is a very small minority, making up about 1% of the hair industry. It's more likely that the agents are being dishonest about the hair's origin.

# להסיר מכשול עבו"ז ממחננו

**נדרשנו לאשר שאלונו: בדבר פאות נכריות אשר יש עליהם איזה-שהוא הכשר שאין בהם שיער מתקרובת עבודה זרה, האם ניתן לסמוך עליהם?**

**תשובה:** כידוע, בשנת תשס"ד נדרשו רבותינו גדולי הפוסקים שבדורנו לבירור שאלת תקרובת עבודה זרה בפיאות נוכריות המעורב בהם שיער אדם שהובא מהודו, מרן הגר"ש אלישיב ומרן הגר"ש הלוי ואזנר זצוק"ל, ולהבחיל"ה מרן הגר"נ קרליץ שליט"א, והרבנים הגאונים חברי הבד"צ העדה החרדית, ובראשם הגאב"ד רי"ט ווייס שליט"א.

## והעלו כולם לאסור פאות כאלו בלבישה.

וכתב מרן הגר"ש אלישיב זצוק"ל (בתשובתו מיום ה' סיון תשס"ד):

**אסור להשתמש בפיאות נכריות העשויות משיער אדם שהובא מהודו, עכ"ל.**  
ובמכתב נוסף (מיום י"א סיון תשס"ד כתב בתו"ד, ובקובץ תשובות ח"ג סי' קיח) וז"ל: "הדבר פשוט שאומרים בזה סתם עכו"ם לעבודה זרה שהרי עצם מטרת המתגלחים הוא לעבודה זרה, עכ"ל. ומרן הגר"ש הלוי ואזנר זצוק"ל כתב במכתב, וז"ל: **מי יודע אם גם זה גרם להרבה מקרים גופניים ונפשיים בבתי ישראל, עכ"ל.**

וכבר התברר בזמננו שבתעשיית השיער בעולם מצוי ריבוי גדול מאד של שיער אדם שמקורו ממאות מקדשי עבודה זרה בהודו, וקשה ביותר לברר מקור השיער שבשווקים,

## על כן אסרו רבותינו כל שיער - שאין בירור גמור מהיכן הוא מגיע.

וכפי שעלה בידינו בבירורים, **אי אפשר לסדר בשום אופן השגחה על דבר זה**, ואפילו שיער הבא ממדינות הרחוקות מהודו, יכול להיות מקורו בהודו. וכמוכן שאי אפשר לסמוך על המפעלים, היבואנים והסוחרים האומרים שהם בעצמם גזזו את השיער במקומם. וחייבים ע"פ הלכה שיהיה פיקוח צמוד של משגיחים יהודים יראי שמים משעת גזיזתו ועד סוף, דבר שאינו אפשרי כלל.

## ועל כן דעתנו דעת תורה שכל ההכשרים שניתנו בזה אין בהם ממש ואין לסמוך עליהם, ושומר נפשו ירחק מהם.

והננו מרגישים חובה בעצמינו למחות על כך שניתן הכשר מאיסור ע"ז על פאות האסורות ע"פ הלכות צניעות (ארוכות ופרועות ובמראה טבעי), ואשר כל גדולי ישראל אסרו לתת הכשר לפאות כאלו. וכשם שלא יעלה על הדעת לתת הכשר על בשר שהתבשל בחלב ולומר כי לכה"פ הוא נשחט 'כהלכה', כך אי אפשר לתת הכשר מעבודה זרה לדבר הנוגד את דיני הצניעות ואסור בלבישה, והרי זה גורם לביטול הצניעות של בנות ישראל.

ובזכות שבנות ישראל יזהרו ממכשולים חמורים אלו, נזכה במהרה לגאולה שלמה בב"א.

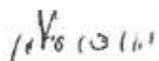
ועל זה באנו על החתום להציל רבים מעון, בין המצרים תשע"ז לפ"ק

  
משה מרדכי קארפ

דומ"צ ורב הגבעה הדרומית  
מודיעין

  
שמעון בעדני

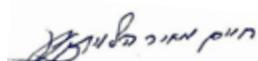
חבר מועצת חכמי התורה

  
יהודה סילמן

אב"ד בני ברק

  
שריאל רוזנברג

ראב"ד בני ברק

  
חיים מאיר הלוי ואזנר

רב אב"ד זכרון מאיר

# Removing the obstacle of Avodah Zara (idol worship) from our camp

We were presented with the following halachic question: There are some wigs on the market which have a hechsher (kosher certification) claiming that they do not contain hair from avoda zara (idol worship) sacrifices. Can we rely on this hechsher?

Our answer: As is well known, in the year 5764, the rabbanim and great poskim in our generation, among them: MaRan HaGaon HaRav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l, MaRan HaGaon HaRav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner zt"l, yb"l MaRan HaGaon HaRav Nissim Karelitz shlit"l, and the rabbanim and gaonim of the Beis Din Tzedek Ha'eida Hachareidus lead by HaGave"n HaRav Y. Tavya Weiss shlit"l, ruled that wigs which contain any human hair from India that was sacrificed for avoda zara

**are unequivocally forbidden and may not be worn.**

(בתשובתו מיום ה' סיון תשס"ד) wrote, MaRan HaGaon HaRav Elyashiv zt"l

**"It is forbidden to use wigs which are made from any human hair which come from India."**

In a subsequent letter the Rav added, ובקובץ תשובות ח"ג סי' קי"ח, "There is a general halachic rule that, עתה עכ"ל לע"ז, - any act that a non-Jew performs which is an act that could be done for avoda zara, (even if his intention is not known), it is accepted that his intent was for avodah zara. Indeed, MaRan HaGaon HaRav Vosner zt"l stated the following: **"Who knows if the use of these wigs has also been the cause of the many physical and emotional tragedies in Jewish homes, I"א."**

It has become known that within the worldwide industry of manufacturing wigs, the majority of human hair originates from the hundreds of idol worshippers in India. It was confirmed that it is extremely difficult to track down where the hair on the market originates from. For this reason, our rabbanim have ruled that

**It is forbidden to use any human hair that does not have an absolute verification of its origin.**

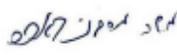
It has come to our attention that it is clearly impossible under any circumstances to oversee this process. Even hair that comes from countries which are far away from India can still originate from India. As is known, one cannot trust or rely on the manufacturers, merchants, or distributors of hair who claim that they themselves cut off the hair in their home towns. It is obligatory according to halacha that a group of Jewish mashgichim (supervisors) who fear Heaven must oversee the process - from the time that the hair is cut until it is woven into a wig. **This is something which is not possible at all.**

**Thus our opinion, the daas Torah is that all hechshelrim that have been given on the wigs are invalid and one cannot rely on them. And one who guards his soul should distance himself from them.**

We also feel obligated to protest against the giving of a hechsher on wigs which are nonetheless forbidden according to the laws of modesty (e.g. long, loose flowing, and natural-looking wigs), upon which all gedolei yisroel have prohibited. One would never consider giving a hechsher on meat that was cooked in milk claiming, "Well at least it was slaughtered according to 'halacha.'" So too, it is impossible to give a hechsher from avoda zara on something which is against tznius and is therefore forbidden to be worn. Indeed, these wigs cause the erosion of tznius among Jewish daughters.

In the merit that Bnos Yisroel will guard themselves from such severe transgressions, we will be zoche to the geula shleima b'korov.

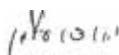
Thus, we undersign in order to save the public from sin. Tammuz 5777



**Rabbi Moshe Mordche Karp**  
Rav of Southern Modiyin



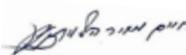
**Rabbi Shimon Badani**  
Member of Moezes Chochmei HaTorah



**Rabbi Yehuda Silman**  
Head of Bais-din Bnei Brak



**Rabbi Seriel Rosenberg**  
Raave'd of Bais-din Bnei Brak



**Rabbi Chaim Meir Vosner**  
Rov of Zichron Meir

**IN CONCLUSION**, it is imperative to reiterate that the wig and hair industry is completely unregulated and lacks moral oversight. Therefore anyone engaging in any form of buying, selling, or production in this market should be aware that it is almost impossible to verify if Indian Temple hair has been used in their wig hair or extensions. It is also crucial to emphasize the overwhelming evidence of Indian Temple hair usage worldwide. The basic economic principle of supply and demand affirms the large probability of India's dominance in the hair market, with Indian Temple hair being the main commodity. The worldwide wig and hair industry needs good quality hair in many lengths and textures, and Indian Temples have it in abundance at very reasonable prices. Having the closest resemblance to the finest European hair, Indian hair becomes the most economical choice for industry insiders. With a continuous reliable supply of hair being sacrificed and cut in the Indian Temples, Indian hair is the secret hair of choice for suppliers. The European, Brazilian, and Russian hair markets are predominantly supplied by Indian hair. It is likely that Indian Temple hair is being used everywhere, even by those who don't know it is there.