



## Hatha Yoga, Live Burial, and Human Hibernation

### How the West (Mis)Conceptualized the *Samadhis* of *Yogi* Haridas in the Nineteenth and the Early Twentieth Centuries

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#### Abstract

Haridas was an early nineteenth century Hindu *hatha yogi* who reportedly survived interments for months at a stretch. His incredible feats had received wide publicity in Europe and America. Through a survey of nineteenth and early twentieth century writings on Haridas's so-called "live burials," this paper scrutinizes how the West tried to make sense of such a peculiar ascetic practice. It emerges that Western conceptualization of this ascetic practice was informed both by colonial discourse and power relationship as well as by the prevailing anxiety about premature burials. The paper reveals that religious and cultural practices acquire new meanings when lifted out of their proper contexts. By highlighting the ways in which Haridas's *samadhis* were (mis)conceptualized abroad, it ventures into a hitherto uncharted territory. Of particular interest is the equation of the *samadhis* with human hibernation. The paper concludes by explaining why Haridas was subsequently forgotten in both India and abroad, and why he needs to be remembered in our present times.

Keywords: Haridas, *hatha yoga*, *samadhi*, live burial, human hibernation

#### Introduction

I will begin with a passage from Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula*, in which Professor Abraham Van Helsing alludes to an Indian ascetic who survived underground burial for an astonishingly long stretch of time:

Can you tell me how the Indian fakir can make himself to die and have been buried, and his grave sealed and corn sowed on it, and the corn reaped and be

cut and sown and reaped and cut again, and then the men come and take away the unbroken seal, and that there lie [*sic*] the Indian fakir, not dead, but that rise up and walk amongst them as before? (Stoker [1897] 1997, 172)

Read in isolation, the passage does not make it clear whether the speaker is referring to a particular individual or to any representative of the group—a prototypical “fakir,” so to speak. But extra textual evidence indicates that Stoker (1847–1912) had a real Indian ascetic in mind while writing this passage. Incidentally, this same person had also stirred the imagination of his contemporary Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894). Stevenson claims that while trying to frame the plot of *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889), he was inspired by “a singular case of a buried and resuscitated fakir, which I had been often told by an uncle of mine, then lately dead, Inspector-General John Balfour” (Stevenson 1905, 136). Neil Macara Brown correctly recognizes that this “resuscitated fakir” was the Hindu ascetic Haridas (2015, 130–35). The “singular case” is obviously his survival of interment for six weeks at a stretch in 1837. This event was witnessed by a group of British guests at the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) among others. It was later widely publicized in the West. While few have recognized that Stoker’s “fakir” was the same Haridas,<sup>1</sup> John Zubrzycki (2018, 130–31) does suggest that reports of so-called “live burials” from India had caught the Irish author’s fancy. Zubrzycki shies away from acknowledging that *Dracula* alludes to Haridas. Perhaps his hesitation stems from the consideration that Stoker could have had other Indian ascetics in his mind too. It is true that similar accounts of live burials performed by other Indian ascetics were circulating in Europe at that time, as Zubrzycki himself shows (2018, 129–30). However, if one compares the passage in *Dracula* with earlier English reports on Haridas’s interments, one may easily detect that Stoker’s passage closely echoes the earlier accounts.<sup>2</sup> This shows that, like his Scottish contemporary, the Irish author’s imagination was also stimulated by tales of Haridas’s live burials.

Through a scrutiny of nineteenth and early twentieth century books and periodicals, this paper highlights how Haridas impressed the West through his survival of several inhumations. Though these live burials have been well documented, until now no study has examined how the West made sense of Haridas’s peculiar practice. This paper thus ventures into an uncharted territory. This is not a paper about Haridas. Instead, it studies Western conceptualizations of his so-called “live burials.” While others have performed such live burials both before and after him, he was the first to receive wide publicity abroad. His live burials also remain the most documented and discussed ones.

For this paper, Haridas, the man, is important only in that he performed these live burials. I do not try to reconstruct the biography of the ascetic, about which not much is known. One only knows that he was active in the early part of the nineteenth century and died before 1850.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This has been recently identified in an article by Chakraborty and Radler (2022, 39).

<sup>2</sup> Writers like Osborne, Honigberger, and Braid mention that a crop of barley was sown over the underground vault in which Haridas remained buried (Osborne 1840, 126; Honigberger 1852, 131; Braid 1850, 16). Since no other account of Indian live burials mention something like this, it is safe to assume that Stoker had Haridas’s interment in his mind.

<sup>3</sup> Honigberger mentions Haridas’s death in his book (1852, 132–33). However, he does not mention the date or the circumstances. The German version of Honigberger’s book was published in 1851 (Chakraborty and Radler

To account for this complete absence of biographical records, it is important to note that many Hindu monastic traditions require ascetics to sever all ties with their previous lives once they embrace renunciation. The ascetics even renounce their birth names (see for instance, Yogananda [1946] 2016, 221–23). Thus, Haridas may not have been his actual name at all.<sup>4</sup> Hindu ascetics are also not expected to reveal details about their previous lives to others.<sup>5</sup> Possibly, that is why neither Haridas nor his contemporaries have left us any biographical account.<sup>6</sup> However, as stated earlier, Haridas's biography is not important because this paper studies Western conceptualizations of his live burials and not his life.

This paper is divided into two sections. The first section recounts Haridas's remarkable exploits, which astonished European spectators in India. Through an examination of available documents, I reveal how European writers tried to make sense of his incredible feats. The Europeans failed to comprehend the true significance of Haridas's live burials because of religious and cultural differences. As a result, they desacralized what was essentially a religious practice. To my knowledge, this fact has not received adequate attention until now. I also demonstrate that Western conceptualizations of Haridas's feats were influenced both by prevailing colonial discourse and power relationship, as well as nineteenth century angst about premature burials. The paper goes on to reveal how various groups in Europe and America, including anti-premature-burial activists, used Haridas's example to promote their own agenda. In the process, they assigned new meanings to the live burials. The most notable one is equating Haridas's live burials with human hibernation. Scholars have so far failed to highlight this. In the second section, I concentrate on later representations of the Hindu ascetic and his live burials in the West. It is contended that on-stage reproductions of live burials as spectacles eventually made the West typecast Haridas as a showman. I finally try to explain why Haridas was subsequently forgotten both in India and abroad. The paper concludes with a survey of contemporary references to Haridas's live burials in academic writings, showing why we still need to remember these.

### **Hatha Yoga or Human Hibernation? How the West (mis)understood Haridas's *Samadhis***

Writing on June 6, 1838, British diplomat and military officer W. G. Osborne mentioned that the British officers in Lahore were excited on that day at “the arrival of a very celebrated character” whom all of them had “expressed great anxiety to see” (1840, 123). Who was this man whose arrival had caused so much excitement? Surprisingly, he was just an itinerant Hindu ascetic named Haridas—someone with neither political authority nor social status. Following the convention of his times, Osborne calls him a fakir.<sup>7</sup> There is something remarkable in the

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2022, 44). Since Honigberger must have taken some time to write this book, one may safely assume Haridas died before 1850.

<sup>4</sup> Haridas (the servant of God Hari or Vishnu) is a popular name among Hindus.

<sup>5</sup> Twentieth century ascetics like Paramahansa Yogananda, who write their autobiographies, are exceptions.

<sup>6</sup> We may also consider that while the foreigners regarded him as someone special, to the Indians of his period he was just one among many miracle workers of his type. Maybe that is why they did not devote any special attention to him.

<sup>7</sup> The nineteenth century Europeans rarely distinguished between a Hindu ascetic and a Muslim *fakir*. They usually categorized all non-Christian South Asian religious ascetics as *fakirs*, irrespective of their religious beliefs.

members of a colonial diplomatic mission expressing such eagerness to meet an insignificant Hindu ascetic. Particularly so, when one considers usual British aversion towards Hindu ascetics whom they deemed annoying.<sup>8</sup> The fact that these colonial diplomats overcame their usual apathy to take such interest in Haridas bespeaks the extent of his popularity even in those early days.

How did a wandering ascetic reach such heights of fame? Why did Europeans continue to remember him several years after his demise? To answer these questions, one must step back in time. In the year 1837, Haridas survived interment in a sealed underground chamber for a stretch of six weeks. The Sikh ruler Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780–1839) had organized this event. The Transylvanian physician Johann Martin Honigberger (1795–1869) reports that Ranjit had conducted the burial under strict surveillance and had taken maximum precaution to detect fraud (1852, 131).<sup>9</sup> The spectators included British officials at Ranjit’s court, among whom was the political agent Sir Claude Martine Wade (1794–1861). It was his testimony that gave Haridas so much publicity.<sup>10</sup> The Scottish surgeon James Braid (1795–1860) first published Wade’s full testimony verbatim in his book *Observations on Trance: or, Human Hibernation* (1850). *Scribner’s Monthly* later republished it in 1880 (Zubrzycki 2018, 413). Wade reports that Haridas was buried inside a closed room. He was first placed in a sitting position inside a bag of white linen. The bag was then tied with a string. Wade significantly adds that Haridas sat “like a Hindoo idol” (Braid 1850, 12). What he probably means is that the ascetic sat in a yogic posture, most likely in the *padmasana*, or the lotus posture.<sup>11</sup> The bag was then placed inside a wooden box four feet long and three feet broad, which was buried in a cell three feet below the floor. All entrances to the room were carefully sealed off, and the building was vigilantly guarded from the outside by Ranjit Singh’s personal guards (11–12). Wade assures us that “the exterior of the building presented no aperture by which air could be admitted, or any communication held by which food could be conveyed to the Fakeer” (11). When the spectators finally opened the room after six weeks, they found Haridas’s body remaining undisturbed in its original position. Wade testifies that the linen bag, which covered Haridas’s body, appeared mildewed—suggesting that it had remained buried underground for a long span of time (12). On medical examination, Haridas’s body showed little signs of life. Wade informs that the medical practitioner could not find any “pulsation in the heart, the temples, or the arm.” However, there was “a heat about the region of the brain” (13).<sup>12</sup> After

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<sup>8</sup> The partial or full nudity of the Hindu ascetics and their strange practices repelled the Europeans. The colonial authorities also mistrusted the itinerant Indian ascetics, who had criminals, vagabonds, mercenary soldiers, and political spies in their ranks (see Singleton 2010, 39–44; Shearer 2020, 63–65).

<sup>9</sup> However, one may note that Honigberger learnt everything from secondary sources and, consequently, one may not rely on his testimony entirely. Even Wade arrived a few hours after the burial, though he insists that no deception or collusion was involved (Braid 1850, 10).

<sup>10</sup> Recognizing the importance of Wade’s testimony, which converted Haridas’s ascetic practice to “something of a trope in ethnographic writing on India,” Mallinson and Singleton reproduce portions of it in their compendium *Roots of Yoga* (2017, 327, 343–45).

<sup>11</sup> The lotus posture is probably the most well-known posture, or *asana*, though texts on yoga describe other seated postures. For more on yogic postures, one may consult Mallinson and Singleton (2017, 86–87, 126, 479).

<sup>12</sup> In a long footnote, Osborne reproduces the entire report of Haridas’s medical examination by Doctor Mc Gregor (1840, 129–138). From this report one understands that the doctor was baffled, though he dismissed

the doctor finished examining the body, Haridas's disciple initiated the procedure of reviving him.<sup>13</sup> First, he bathed him in hot water and massaged his limbs. Next the disciple placed a hot roti<sup>14</sup> on the top of his head and pulled out his nose and ear plugs. The tongue, which had closed the gullet, was then straightened. Finally, he rubbed his master's eyelids with clarified butter, or *ghee*. Wade mentions that Haridas's respiration began with a "violent convulsion," and he came to his senses very slowly. The whole procedure of reviving the ascetic did not take more than half an hour (14).

The whole performance, if one may call it so, was indeed an astounding one. But it raises several questions. First, one wonders whether it is at all possible to survive six weeks interment without food, water, and air. A proper medical explanation being unavailable, the feat remains too fantastic for one to readily believe in. We cannot deny that many swindlers in India often fake such live burials to deceive the gullible public.<sup>15</sup> Both Siegel and Zubrzycki cite reports of several live burials that were exposed as deceptions in the past (Siegel 1991, 169; Zubrzycki 2018, 129–130). Of course, this does not allow us to denounce Haridas as a fraudster outright. A few medical studies do maintain that *yogis* can become hypometabolic at will and reduce their oxygen intake for a length of time (see Heller, Elsner, and Rao 1987). Still, six weeks seems an incredibly long span of time to live without air. Perhaps it is best to suspend our judgement on Haridas, until we unearth some concrete proof either in favor of or against him.<sup>16</sup> Leaving aside this issue, which cannot be resolved to one's satisfaction, the paper instead turns to those questions which can be more gratifyingly answered. The following questions appear pertinent: Why did Ranjit Singh organize this spectacle? What motivated Haridas to go through the live burials? And finally, how did his European contemporaries make sense of this event? The first question is the easiest to answer. Honigberger informs us that the skeptical Ranjit Singh wanted to test the claims of the ascetic. He writes:

The maharajah [*sic*] thought it impossible. To convince himself of the truth of the assertion, he ordered the faqueer to be brought to court, and caused him to undergo the experiment, assuring him that no precaution should be omitted to discover whether it was a deception. (Honigberger 1852, 131)

Wade too points out that the ruler was skeptical (Braid 1850, 11). Osborne mentions that the incredulous maharaja had the ascetic dug up twice during the period of interment to satisfy

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Haridas's own explanations with characteristic colonial arrogance (Osborne 1840, 138). N. C. Paul also reproduces part of this report in his treatise (1882, 54–55). An article discussing the medical aspects of the case was published in *The Calcutta Medical Journal* in 1835 (Honigberger 1852, 132; "Alive in the Grave" 1885, 3). However, I could not trace it despite the best of my efforts.

<sup>13</sup> Wade calls him Haridas's "servant." But more likely, this man was his disciple.

<sup>14</sup> Wade called it "hot wheaten cake" (Braid 1850, 13). This is obviously Indian bread, or *roti*.

<sup>15</sup> Siegel explains, "that in India one is thought to gain merit and a share in the holy man's defiance of death by giving him money has made it a profitable trick for the magician to perform" (1991, 170).

<sup>16</sup> Until then one may maintain the position that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.' Notably, Alistair Shearer cites this aphorism while writing about contemporary scholarly dismissal of *yogis*'s "psychic abilities" (2020, 62).

his curiosity (1840, 126).<sup>17</sup> These records thus indicate that Ranjit made Haridas undergo the live burial mainly as an experiment. Incidentally, Wade reports that immediately after waking up from his death-like trance, Haridas asked the question, “Do you believe me now?” (Braid 1850, 14). The fact that this was the very first thing to come to his mind shows that the ascetic was anxious to prove himself. Obviously, the ruler did not believe in him in the beginning. Wade’s testimony thus further confirms that Ranjit Singh had the live burial organized to test the claims of the ascetic.

The second question is more difficult to answer than the first one. Why did Haridas agree to undergo this live burial? It certainly involved taking considerable risks. Even if one assumes that the live burial was merely a deception involving minimal health hazard, the ascetic still faced the danger of being exposed for fraud. Why did he brave such risks? As it happens, Haridas underwent interment not just once but many times—sometimes for even longer periods.<sup>18</sup> Did he risk his life merely for money, just as a professional showman would? It cannot be denied that wealth acted as an ostensible incentive for him. Wade mentions that Ranjit Singh had handsomely rewarded Haridas with “a pearl necklace and superb pair of gold bracelets, and pieces of silk and muslin, and shawls” (Braid 1850, 14). Osborne reports that the ascetic had asked the British for a reward, and that they had promised to pay him fifteen hundred rupees<sup>19</sup> in cash and to have a *jagir* with an annual revenue of two thousand rupees bestowed on him (1840, 171). Osborne’s own assessment was that Haridas was a performer living by this “trade” (1840, 124). Another observer Lt. Boileau mentions that the ascetic allowed himself “to be buried for weeks or months by any person who will pay him handsomely for the same” (1837, 43).<sup>20</sup> All these accounts seem to suggest that whatever Haridas did, he did for money. But it would be very wrong to assume that Haridas was simply a professional entertainer masquerading as an ascetic. While expectation of pecuniary rewards may have motivated him partially, the ascetic had other considerations which his European contemporaries either did not know about or deliberately chose to ignore. It is germane to remember here that Hindu ascetics have been practicing such live burials since remote times. The Moroccan globetrotter Ibn Battuta (1304–1368/69) reports that Hindu *yogis* stayed alive in graves without food and drink for months, and sometimes even for an entire year (2017, 342). Jean Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689), one of the early European visitors to India,

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<sup>17</sup> Although, one must note that Osborne conflates two different accounts of Haridas’s interments: one witnessed by Wade in 1837 and a subsequent one. It was during the latter event that a crop of barley was sown over his ‘grave’ (Braid 1850, 16). Stoker refers to this incident in *Dracula*.

<sup>18</sup> Honigberger mentions that he was interred at different locations—at Jammu, Jasrota, Amritsar and British territories in India (1852, 132). From Lt. Boileau, we learn that he survived another underground burial for a month at Jaisalmer in March-April 1835 (1837, 41).

<sup>19</sup> Around 100 pounds in 1838. That is about £11, 812 or INR 11,82,173 in 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Boileau did not name the ascetic in his book. Some like N. C. Paul and Zubrzycki consequently assume that he was referring to a different man (Paul 1882, 55–57; Zubrzycki 2018, 129). But in a footnote Wade identifies this unnamed ascetic as Haridas (Braid 1850, 16). Following Wade, Brown too identifies this *yogi* as Haridas (Brown 2015, 133). This paper likewise follows Wade, believing that he knew more about a contemporary affair than we do.

mention witnessing a live burial at Surat (1889, 199).<sup>21</sup> Honigberger, too, mention that he had heard the legend of a *yogi* who had reportedly survived a hundred year inside his “grave” (1852, 134). Nor did this practice come to an end in our own times.<sup>22</sup> Mallinson and Singleton report, “Public *samadhi* burials still occur today, such as the case of the *yogi* known as Pilot Baba,<sup>23</sup> who, along with his female Japanese disciple, has remained in an open pit for up to a week at every Kumbh Mela since 1992” (2017, 327).

From these facts it becomes obvious that in undergoing these so-called “live burials,” Haridas was really following an age-old practice. This practice is particularly related to the Hindu ascetics known as the *hattha yogis*. The word *hattha*, as Mallinson defines, means “force.” It denotes “a system of physical techniques supplementary to *yoga*” (Mallinson 2011, 770). More simply, *hattha yoga* “is *yoga* that uses the techniques of *hattha*” (770).<sup>24</sup> While colonial authors failed to identify him as one, clues in their texts do indicate that Haridas was doubtlessly a *hattha yogi*.<sup>25</sup> For instance, it becomes clear from Honigberger’s memoir that the ascetic practiced the *hattha yogic* techniques of *dhauti* and *basti*. He writes, “On the day of his burial, instead of food, he slowly swallowed, in the presence of the assembly, a rag of three fingers in breadth and thirty yards in length, and afterwards extracted it, for the purpose of removing all foreign matters in the stomach” (Honigberger 1852, 133–34). The author also mentions that prior to this, he had his innards cleansed by having “a quantity of water” drawn into his anus with a tube while squatting inside a tub filled with water (133). Although both Honigberger and Osborne failed to understand the significance of these practices and ridiculed them (Honigberger 1852, 134; Osborne 1840, 125), we now know that these are *hattha yogic* techniques for cleansing bodily humors. The process of cleansing the innards by swallowing and extracting a piece of cloth is known as *dhauti*, while drawing water and expelling it through the anus is known as *basti* (Mallinson 2011, 775; Singleton 2010, 28). In their compendium on *yoga*, Mallinson and Singleton provide a further proof of Haridas being a *hattha yogi*. They point out in one of their notes that the methods used to revive the *yogi* after exhumation were similar to the ones prescribed in *hattha yogic* manuals like *Khecarividya* and *Hathatattvakaumudi* (2017, 500). One may also recall that Haridas’s tongue was reported to have rolled back and closed his gullet during his “trance” (Braid 1840, 13; Honigberger 1852, 133). This, in *hattha yogic*

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, like Ranjit Singh, the Dutch Commander of Surat, who accompanied Tavernier, had the ascetic closely watched. While the Europeans failed to discover any fraud, the ascetic could not remain in his “grave” for longer than seven days (Tavernier 1889, 199–200).

<sup>22</sup> Siegel informs that the government of India banned live burials in 1955, keeping in view the high rate of fatality (1991, 170). However, it is still practiced—sometimes even openly.

<sup>23</sup> Pilot Baba (formerly, Wing Commander Kapil Singh) was a pilot in the Indian Airforce before becoming an ascetic. He has authored several books and has founded several meditation centers. However, some treat his claims of surviving live burials with skepticism (Verma 1984).

<sup>24</sup> Unlike the contemporary secularized postural *yoga*, *hattha yoga* is essentially a religious and spiritual discipline. For a brief introduction to *hattha yoga*, one may consult Ondračka’s entry on *hattha yoga* in *Hinduism and Tribal Religions* (2022, 577–88).

<sup>25</sup> None of the nineteenth century European writers identified Haridas as a *hattha yogi*. They all called him a “fakir” instead. To my knowledge, the Indian Surgeon N. C. Paul was the first to identify him as a *hattha yogi* (Paul 1882, 57).

parlance, is the *khecarimudra*—the sealing of the uvula with the tongue rolled backwards. Practitioners believe that this practice rejuvenates the body (Mallinson 2011, 774; Ondračka 2022, 582). Haridas’s expertise in these techniques proves beyond doubt that he was a *hatha yogi*.

Therefore, it is only in the context of *hatha yoga* that the true significance of Haridas’s interments can be grasped. It transpires that what the Western observers (mis)understood as live burial was actually what the *yogis* call *samadhi*.<sup>26</sup> As Mallinson and Singleton show, different schools of *yoga* interpret the term *samadhi* in different ways (2017, xxxi, 323–30). Generally, *samadhi* is understood as the union between the individual self and the Supreme Self. As the *hatha yogis* conceptualize it, *samadhi* is “a death-like trance in which the yogi is insensible to stimuli and even unaware of himself” (323). *Hatha yogic* texts like *Vivekamartanda* (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 339) also claim that a *yogi* attains superhuman endurance and invulnerability during this state. Such a state leads to the attainment of liberation. *Samadhi* is thus to be understood as a religious practice. This makes it clear what Haridas’s true intention was when he allowed himself to be buried and revived. While wealth may have acted as a probable incentive, he was keener to demonstrate his power and sanctity as a *hatha yogi*. As Mallinson and Singleton point out, “the burial and revival of the yogi in *samadhi*” became in such contexts “a kind of ritual display of yogic prowess” (xxx). Obviously, Haridas was not seeking liberation when he underwent his interments. One may remember that he performed his *samadhis* publicly; while scriptures like the *Bhagavad Gita* 6.10, as well as several *hatha yogic* texts, enjoin ascetics to practice *yoga* in seclusion (*Bhagavad Gita* 1984, 285; see also Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 52, 59–60). He also accepted, and by some accounts demanded, pecuniary rewards. One cannot but feel that in publicly displaying his *yogic* prowess in this manner, he was indeed acting as an entertainer.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, Haridas’s objectives were much broader than his European contemporaries recognized. As Oman points out, in India, once a *yogi* emerges from his *samadhi* he is sure to be accepted as “an undoubted saint and an object of popular veneration ever afterwards” (1903, 42–43). Haridas certainly aspired to this position. There is always more profit in being recognized as a saint than as a mere entertainer. Incidentally, Lt. Boileau mentions that the childless ruler of Jaisalmer had persuaded the ascetic to bury himself alive in the hope of obtaining an offspring (1837, 43).<sup>28</sup> In making Haridas undergo a *samadhi*, the ruler was hoping to acquire merit which, in his belief, would have enabled him to beget an heir. His action reveals that to him the *hatha yogi* was a holy man and not an ordinary entertainer. Obviously, many of his countrymen must have felt the same. Haridas himself must have sought recognition as a venerable *hatha yogi*—an ascetic rather than a showman, which made him perform the live burials time after time.<sup>29</sup> The Europeans, however, failed to comprehend this. Viewing wealth as his sole motivation, they understood

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<sup>26</sup> “Live burial” is a Western expression. Indians do not see it as “live burial,” but as *samadhi*.

<sup>27</sup> Some *hatha yogic* texts warn the practitioners not to demonstrate their powers in public. Others, however, allow it on the ground that this may encourage people to practice *yoga* (see Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 360–61).

<sup>28</sup> Boileau himself chose to see Haridas as a performer, as noted earlier.

<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, Haridas has not left us any written testimony. His Indian contemporaries did not record his views either. So, one can only guess at his intention.



the *samadhis* only as spectacles. They thereby effectively desacralized what was fundamentally a religious practice.

Finally, I try to assess how the people in the West conceptualized Haridas's feats. It is tempting to invoke the framework of colonial discourse analysis to argue that the ascetic and his acts were often negatively represented abroad, in order to foster a positive self-image of the Westerners by contrast. The colonizing British also feared the Hindu Nath *yogis* and Muslim Madari *fakirs*, who served as mercenary soldiers and could be used against them by Indian rulers (Shearer 2020, 63–65). They were therefore negatively stereotyped to alienate them from the English educated Indians.<sup>30</sup> We may remember that the word *fakir* itself carried largely negative connotations in the West at that time. The identification of Haridas as a *fakir* was bound to typecast him as a reprehensible character to some extent. This is reflected in Osborne's and Honigberger's portrayals of Haridas, as shown below. Likewise, certain aspects of Haridas's performance—*basti* in particular—became markers of alterity. Osborne found *basti* “disgusting” and Honigberger called it “ridiculous” (Osborne 1840, 125; Honigberger 1852, 134). Both tropes were frequently used in the colonial period to highlight the inferiority of the colonized people. However, one should note that the religious root of the live burials was ignored at that point. Consequently, the colonizers did not employ Haridas's live burials to otherize Hindu religious beliefs in the nineteenth century. That was done in the early twentieth century when they came to recognize *samadhi* as a religious practice. More interesting are the ways in which Haridas's *samadhis* were conceptualized abroad, which completely differed from the way it was understood in India. Western representations of his *samadhis* show how religious and cultural practices acquire new meanings when lifted out of their proper context. This, in fact, is a well-recognized phenomenon. While discussing American representations of Hindu holy men, Kirin Narayan points out that “indigenous dimensions of meaning may be drained out . . . when they travel” (1993, 477). She further adds, “Strategically manipulated by a variety of groups within a host culture to make points that may only tangentially refer to the implicated Other, such images are recast around internal cultural debates” (Narayan 1993, 477). The same thing happened in case of the live burials/*samadhis*. Interestingly, in their attempts to “recast” the so-called “live burials” “around internal cultural debates,” the Westerners, at times, downplayed the alterity of Haridas's performances. This will be demonstrated as we proceed.

It is easy to see that Western understanding of Haridas's *samadhis* differ significantly from Indian. Lee Siegel explains, “While the feat, for the Indian spectators of it, represents the ideal of being dead-in-life, being a *jivan-mukta*, for the Western spectators, the same trick represents the opposite ideal—being alive-in-death” (1991, 169). Here, it must be pointed out that “dead-in-life” is a mistranslation of the term *jivan-mukta*. The proper translation is “liberated while living,” as Mallinson and Singleton translate it (2017, 398). While this is a “difficult and contradictory notion” as the two authors point out (Mallinson and Singleton 2017, 399), the basic idea is that it is possible to achieve liberation even during one's lifetime. This state of existence transcends the dichotomies of pleasure and pain, or life and death. Though Siegel mistranslates the word, he is correct in realizing that the Western spectators understood Haridas's feat differently. One can discern several reasons behind this. First, proper

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<sup>30</sup> Shearer shows that the British were successful in this (2020, 65–66).

understanding of *samadhi* demands close familiarity with Hindu scriptures most of which are written in Sanskrit. Only a few in nineteenth century Europe and America had the determination or the patience to master a difficult foreign language like it. It was much easier to ignore the Sanskrit sources altogether. Secondly, the Christian West was prejudiced against Hindu religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, it was not too keen to probe into Hindu religious texts to understand the rationale of *samadhis*. Thirdly, nineteenth century Europeans usually loathed the Hindu ascetics. As a result, they generally remained uninterested in their doctrines and practices. Finally, the unequal power relationship between the European colonizers and the Indian colonized allowed the Europeans to ignore and suppress the colonized people's viewpoint. Thus, instead of seeking answers directly from the *yogis* or *yogic* texts, they preferred to invent their own explanations for *samadhis*. Where the Indians witnessed the *yogi's* attainment of endurance and invulnerability in *samadhi*, the Europeans discerned resurrection after death. The latter understanding of Haridas's feat was obviously colored by the Christian faith of the European observers, as the idea of resurrection is foreign to Hindu eschatology.<sup>31</sup> However, the interpretation of Haridas's *samadhis* as resurrections after death posed a significant problem to the nineteenth century Europeans. In Christian belief, resurrection is essentially the prerogative of the Christian God. None but Jesus can resurrect himself at will. In fact, believers consider resurrection as the greatest miracle performed by Jesus. As *New Catholic Encyclopedia* explains, "Apart from the resurrection-faith, there would have been no Christian community, no NT [New Testament], and scarcely any historical memory of Jesus of Nazareth" (Ceroke 2003, 148). But if Haridas could die and resurrect himself at will, then he would be almost on a par with Christ. Indeed, some have drawn parallels between Jesus and Hindu ascetics/magicians like Haridas. They thereby implicitly challenged Christ's status as the God incarnate. Lee Siegel reports that a certain Indian magician had told him during a private interview that Jesus had learnt the "Buried Alive Trick" from India (1991, 171). Obviously, any devout Christian will find this idea entirely unacceptable. More so the colonizing Europeans, who were bent on establishing their superiority over the Indians. They felt compelled to explain away *samadhis* of *yogis* like Haridas as something different from a true resurrection or a proper miracle. This explains why, in a footnote to Wade's narrative, Braid attempted to differentiate between Jesus's miracle and the feats of the "fakeers." He writes:

These feats of the Fakeers in no way invalidate the importance of the Gospel miracle of the resurrection of Christ. In the latter case, the transfixing of the heart by the soldier's spear was necessarily a mortal wound, from which recovery was impossible unless by a miracle. (Braid 1850, 14)

Behind this attempt to defend Jesus's resurrection, lay the writer's deep anxiety. One feels that scientific temperament alone did not urge the nineteenth century Europeans to look for a rational or scientific explanation behind Haridas's feats. The necessity of defending their own religious convictions equally propelled them. However, they must have found it an onerous

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<sup>31</sup> I must point out that while Hindu eschatology does not include a belief in resurrection in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic sense, the idea of revival after death is not altogether alien to Hindu thinking. Various Hindu myths and legends center on resurrections of the dead. The most well-known is the tale of the devoted wife Savitri in the *Mahabharata*. For a concise account, one may see the one by Arisha Sattar in *The Hindu* (2017).

task. Testimonies of eyewitnesses were difficult to brush aside, and scientific explanations were hard to come by. This probably explains why some Europeans of that period became hostile towards Indian practitioners of live burials.<sup>32</sup> Their animosity sprang from the difficulty they faced in discrediting the claims of these ascetics.<sup>33</sup> One witnesses this in the case of Haridas. Colonial officers like Osborne were not the only ones to cast aspersions on him. Even the more genial Honigberger tried to vilify him as a libertine based on scanty evidence (1852, 132–33).<sup>34</sup>

As a matter of fact, nineteenth century Europeans exhibited a curious ambivalence towards the so-called “Indian live burials” and their practitioners. On the one hand, they were often dismissive and sometimes openly hostile. Thus, Osborne became prejudiced against Haridas even before he had the opportunity of witnessing him undergo his *samadhi*. The way he describes the ascetic’s facial appearance makes this apparent. He describes him as one “with a disagreeable and cunning expression of countenance” (Osborne 1840, 128).<sup>35</sup> This is no doubt a subjective impression, as other European writers do not mention this. Moreover, Osborne chose to dismiss Haridas’s performance as a “farce” from the very outset (1840, 170). From the accounts of Boileau, Braid and Honigberger, it likewise becomes apparent that many other European spectators had similarly mistrusted Haridas (Boileau 1837, 43; Braid 1850, 15–16; Honigberger 1852, 132). As noted earlier, such hostility often sprang from the Western spectators’ anxiety to defend their core religious belief.

On the other hand, many nineteenth century Europeans were also fascinated with these so-called “Indian live burials” on medical grounds. To an extent, this fascination originated from Western anxiety regarding premature burials. As Jan Bondeson (2001) points out, the fear of premature burial started haunting European psyche at least from the seventeenth century onwards. The basic fear was that people might be mistaken for dead and interred alive. They might then revive in their coffins, only to die a second agonizing death. By the nineteenth century, Bondeson writes, “the danger of premature burial had become one of the most-feared perils of everyday life, and a torrent of pamphlets and academic theses were dedicated to this subject by writers all over Europe” (2001, 156). In this situation, the Indian live burials (really, *samadhis*) seemed to offer further evidence of a human being’s ability to revive from a comatose state or death-like trance. Particularly Haridas, whose feats were well documented, appeared to provide an incontestable proof of this. There exists concrete evidence to demonstrate that

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<sup>32</sup> Not counting the usual animosity of the Europeans towards all Indian ascetics, whether Hindu or from any other non-Christian faith.

<sup>33</sup> One may wonder why the Muslims in India rarely felt such anxiety. As explanation, one may point out that the Muslims propagated competing accounts of miracles by their own saints (for evidence, see Oman 1903, 64–65). However, for the nineteenth century Protestant British colonizers, this solution was unacceptable.

<sup>34</sup> Honigberger alleges that Haridas was an infamous womanizer (1852, 132–33). But no other contemporary source backs up this claim. He himself admits that the local Hindus “did not like to hear” this charge against the ascetic (132).

<sup>35</sup> Haridas’s subsequent hesitation to undergo live burial in presence of the British officers convinced Osborne that he was a fraud (1840, 170–75). However, Wade defends him and hints that the open hostility expressed by the British officers intimidated the *yogi* (Braid 1850, 14–15). Honigberger too defends Haridas against the charge of fraud (1852, 132).

behind European fascination with Indian live burials in general, and Haridas in particular, there lay the latent anxiety about premature burials. Thus, one finds that an 1885 article in *The Cotton Factory Times*, which focused on Haridas and other *yogis* like him, was tellingly titled “Alive in the Grave” (1885, 3). Dr. Franz Hartmann (1838–1912), physician, occultist, and anti-premature burial activist,<sup>36</sup> had dedicated five entire pages to Haridas in his 1895 monograph on premature burials (1895, 35–40).<sup>37</sup> Again, in 1897, Dr. C. Theodore Green referred to Haridas’s case while reviewing books on premature burials in *The Birkenhead News* (1897, 2). All these facts prove that in European minds Haridas came to be associated with premature burials. One may also remember that, in a way, both Stoker’s *Dracula* and Stevenson’s *The Master of Ballantrae* are about premature burials. Particularly *Dracula*, as Natalia Wójcicka points out, candidly reflects the fear of premature burials (2010, 184). In the novel, Van Helsing hesitates to kill the undead Lucy—fearing opposition from her fiancé Arthur Godalming. He surmises that Arthur might presume that she was prematurely buried by mistake (Stoker [1897] 1997, 180).<sup>38</sup> Later, Arthur reacts exactly as Van Helsing had guessed. On learning about Lucy’s posthumous existence, he screams in agony, “Good God! What do you mean? Has there been a mistake; has she been buried alive?” (183). These passages from *Dracula* prove that Stoker was doubtlessly mindful of Victorian worries about premature burials. It is therefore not surprising that both he and Stevenson had remembered Haridas, whom Western imagination associated with survival in the grave. All the above evidence prove that the Europeans took interest in Haridas because, in their eyes, he demonstrated the possibility of reviving after the cessation of life processes.

Western accounts of Haridas’s *samadhis* make it clear that the writers failed to comprehend the true significance of the practice due to cultural and religious differences. Unlike the Hindus, they did not witness the *yogis*’s attainment of supposed invulnerability or the state of liberation in *samadhi*. The Westerners were only fascinated by the sensational aspect of surviving inhumations. The inner meaning of the performance totally escaped them. Choosing to ignore the Hindu interpretation of this phenomenon, they came up with several fanciful theories instead. One such theory equated Haridas’s *samadhis* with human hibernations. The human hibernation theory has its root in Western anxiety regarding premature burials. The basic idea is that human beings can voluntarily or involuntarily enter a state of hibernation, during which their bodily activities remain suspended, and they appear dead to the onlookers (see Bondeson 2001, 178–79). This theory particularly appealed to the anti-premature-burial activists, who used it to call for reform of burial practices.<sup>39</sup> When these activists came to know about Haridas’s *samadhis*, they began to present these as compelling evidences of human hibernation. One may remember Franz Hartmann’s monograph here. These activists found a

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<sup>36</sup> Dr. Hartmann was also a Theosophist and a *yoga* enthusiast, as Shearer shows (2020, 111–12).

<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Hartmann failed to identify that all the different ascetics he was writing about were the one and the same person—namely, Haridas the *batha yogi*. He was either a careless reader or deliberately chose to be cavalier with facts.

<sup>38</sup> The beautiful Lucy Westenra was turned into a vampire by Count Dracula. Her admirers were forced to kill her.

<sup>39</sup> For more details on anti-premature-burial activists and their use of the human hibernation theory, see Bondeson (2001, 156–203).

predecessor in James Braid, who was the first to interpret Haridas's *samadhis* as human hibernations. Curiously, Braid was neither an expert on Indian religions nor did he meet the *yogi* in person. All his information on Haridas were derived from others. But his views still carried weight in the nineteenth century, as he was a respected surgeon renowned for his pioneering investigations into hypnotism. In fact, it was this research on hypnotism that made him take interest in Haridas in the first place. A large portion of his book *Observations on Trance: or, Human Hibernation* is devoted to the ascetic. After surveying European narratives on Haridas and a few ascetics like him, Braid concluded that these ascetics were "self-hypnotists" who could put themselves into "a state of temporary hibernation, or trance" (1850, 26). In his view, such live burials were therefore instances of human hibernation—analogueous to hibernation in animals. As Braid explains, a "live burial" is a "physiological fact" which is "capable of being induced by artificial contrivance, as well as of occurring spontaneously occasionally in the condition designated *cataplexy* or *trance [sic]*" (1850, 56). Any observer may note today that these were crude inferences. Braid did not draw his conclusions from actual observations and experimentations. He relied heavily on hearsay instead. His approach was, therefore, totally unscientific. However, Braid's contemporaries remained indifferent to his questionable method. This was on three grounds. First, hypnotism was a little understood topic in Braid's times. Few of his contemporaries possessed the in-depth knowledge required to challenge the method and assumptions of an expert like Braid. Secondly, Braid completely ruled out all supernatural involvement in this matter—thereby making his inferences more acceptable to his European readers. Finally, by drawing a parallel between *yogis's samadhis* and animal hibernations, Braid implicitly dehumanized the *yogis*. His approach conformed to the colonial viewpoint, which envisioned Hindu ascetics as brutish subhuman creatures.

Braid's book set the trend for subsequent conceptualizations of Haridas and his *samadhis* in the West. His idea became so influential that even the Indian surgeon Nobin Chandra Pal, or N. C. Paul as he called himself, adopted it. In *A Treatise on the Yoga Philosophy*, originally published in 1851, Paul defined both *yoga* and *samadhi* as "human hibernation"—thereby evincing Braid's influence on his thinking (1882, *sic passim*). His unquestioning adoption of Braid's viewpoint validates the argument of postcolonial thinkers that colonial discourse was essentially cross-referential. In Said's famous formulation, "a system for citing works and authors" ([1978] 2001, 23). Himself an Indian, Paul must have known very well about the religious and cultural meaning of *samadhi*. And yet, he chose to ignore the indigenous viewpoint and accepted Braid's. Of course, this was due to Braid's status as a European; to borrow Said's words again, due to his "positional superiority" (7). If an Indian like Paul uncritically accepted Braid's explanations, it is unsurprising to find the foreigners doing the same. Early observers like Boileau and Osborne had already presented Haridas as a showman who earned his living by performing the so-called "live burials." By providing an apparent scientific explanation, Braid managed to make his *samadhis* seem even more commonplace. He sought to prove that such feats were not only replicable through "artificial contrivance," but also that lower animals could naturally enter such a state (Braid 1850, 26–28). Such hibernations could even involuntarily occur during *cataplexies* (Braid 1850, 28). Naturally, this explanation demystified Haridas's feat. By showing it as commonplace, Braid was further able to downplay its religious significance and effectively desacralize it. Subsequent nineteenth century writers followed Braid in envisioning Haridas's *samadhis* as instances of human hibernation. The live

burials/*samadhis* were still seen as marvellous, but completely natural in origin and replicable. Thus, one finds that Van Helsing talks about the hibernation of toads immediately before he mentions Haridas's live burial in *Dracula* (Stoker [1897] 1997, 172). By relating the ascetic to the toad, Stoker both implicitly dehumanizes the ascetic and shows that there is nothing magical in his live burials. Newspapers like *The Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* (6 March 1870), *The Cotton Factory Times* (23 October 1885), *The Civil and Military Gazette* (8 July 1891) and *The Birkenhead News* (20 January 1897) also invoked the human hibernation theory to explain away Haridas's live burials. Usually, these reporters believed in the authenticity of the ascetic's feats; although a few still expressed guarded scepticism—like the writer in *The Civil and Military Gazette* ("Fakirs' Fakes" 1891, 6). All of them, however, completely desacralized Haridas's *samadhis* by ignoring the religious angle.

Besides his so-called "hibernations," Haridas's unnaturally long fasts also intrigued the West. But just as they had tried to provide a rational explanation of *samadhis* to make these appear commonplace, they likewise took pains to show that such lengthy fasts were not unprecedented. Newspapers like *The Ardrossan and Saltcoat's Herald* compared reports of Haridas's fasts inside his graves with tales of similar long fasts from Europe ("Great Fasts" 1880). Here, one may note how a Wales newspaper once cunningly cited reports of Haridas's fasts as evidence to defend some malefactors. On 17 December, 1869, the "fasting girl," twelve-year-old Sarah Jacob, died in Wales after a prolonged fast which supposedly lasted for two years—from October 1867 to December 1869.<sup>40</sup> It was alleged that her fasting was a set-up and that the girl died of starvation upon being closely watched. Her parents, Evan and Hannah Jacob, were tried on the charge of manslaughter, as they had prevented the nurses from giving her food.<sup>41</sup> Both were eventually convicted and sentenced to imprisonment (Conrad 2013). However, *The Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* chose to support them during the trial. It tried to vindicate the accused by arguing that such long fasts were not uncommon and therefore Sarah and her parents were not frauds. Among the cases of long fasts cited by the newspaper was Haridas's ("The Fasting Girl" 1870, 7). Obviously, this reporter saw Haridas as someone whose likeness could be found nearer home and who was therefore not exceptional. As a matter of fact, by the end of the nineteenth century, the majority in the West had stopped seeing Haridas as a miracle worker. Neither his long fasts nor his survival of underground burials were seen as supernatural, though these continued to draw attention even during the early part of the next century.

A close study of the above-mentioned documents reveals an interesting fact. In describing Haridas's live burials, some of these writers emphasized sameness rather than difference. To both the anti-premature-burial activists and the writers defending the fasting girls, there is essentially nothing extraordinary about Haridas's performances as similar examples can be found at home. By downplaying difference, they lifted these out of the sphere of self/other or colonizer/colonized dichotomy. Significantly, some journals like *The Birkenhead News* and *The*

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<sup>40</sup> There were quite a few such fasting girls in the Victorian period. They reportedly stopped eating for months or even years at a stretch—often for religious reasons (see Conrad 2013). The credulous Victorians revered them, drawing many to this lucrative profession.

<sup>41</sup> As a so-called "fasting girl," Sarah received huge donations from the believers. It appears that this increased the cupidity of her parents.

*Carmarthen Weekly Reporter* steered clear of value judgements when they described Haridas's live burials. Unlike others, these did not take the opportunity to denigrate the beliefs and practices of the colonized people. They followed this course because their arguments would have lost force if Haridas's live burials seemed too alien to their European readers to relate to. I further argue that what enabled these writers to stress on sameness instead of difference was the assigning of a completely new meaning to the live burials. Because of the human hibernation theory, Western writers no longer needed to conceptualize the live burials as either a religious practice or a miracle. It could be treated as something mundane. Of course, this effacement of the alterity of Haridas's performances was itself a function of the unequal power relationship between the colonizers and the colonized which enabled the suppression of the religious implications of live burials.

In this section we have seen how the Europeans took pains to understand Haridas's *samadhis*, desacralizing these in the process. They interpreted these firstly as a showman's performances, and secondly as instances of human hibernation. The religious root of Haridas's feats remained ignored, thanks largely to the unequal power relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. The next section reveals how this subsequently influenced the way this *batha yogi* and his *samadhis* came to be perceived in Europe and America. It also shows how the (mis)understanding of his *samadhi* as a stage spectacle led to the development of a prejudice against Haridas in the long run.

### **Saint or Charlatan: How the West Remembers Haridas**

By the early decades of the twentieth century, Haridas's fame had spread far and wide. As evidence, one may mention an article entitled "Respirata fachirilor" [trans. "Fakirs' Breathing"] published in the Romanian journal *Medicina populara* in 1906—which names Haridas.<sup>42</sup> Another Romanian article by one M. Ahmad "Arta vrajitoareasca a fachirilor" [trans. "The Magical Art of Fakirs"], published in 1937, also alludes to Haridas's *samadhis*. In Germany, William Thierry Preyer introduced Haridas to the reading public through his 1882 translation of Braid's book entitled *Der Hypnotismus* (Garbe 1900, 482). On the other side of the Atlantic, *The Monist* published a translation of the German Indologist Richard Garbe's treatise on the "voluntary trance" of Indian ascetics in 1900.<sup>43</sup> This text mentions Haridas among others. Likewise, Charles Rockwell Lanman (1917) refers to the *yogi* while writing about Hindu ascetics and their powers. The fact that writers from different countries named him in their writings, shows that Haridas's fame had spread throughout the Western world—from Romania to the United States—by this time.<sup>44</sup>

Interestingly, Western conceptualization of the so-called "Indian live burials" also began to change at the turn of the century. Hitherto, Western writers had completely ignored the *batha yogi's* own explanations. But the urge to comprehend the Indian perspective began to

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<sup>42</sup> Incidentally, the author, one Dr. A.L., seems to have had Boileau's narrative in mind rather than Wade's or Osborne's, for he refers to his interment at Jaisalmer instead of the one at Lahore.

<sup>43</sup> It was translated into English by W. H. Carruth, an American professor.

<sup>44</sup> From Rianne Siebenga's study, one learns that even magic lantern slideshows mentioned Haridas during this period (2012, 455).

grow with the dawning of the twentieth century. This must have had its origin in Western scholars' increased familiarity with Hindu doctrines and practices. Theosophy also seems to have spurred an interest in the activities of the *batha yogis*. As Ondračka reminds us, "the first prominent promoters of Hathayoga in the West were the theosophists" (2022, 578). Whatever their motivation might have been, one finds that several Western writers of this period tried to understand Haridas's live burials in light of *yogic* doctrines. For instance, to Dr. A. L., the *fakir's* "voluntary catalepsy" exemplified "the victory of the spirit over the matter" (1906, 3). One finds that this explanation is somewhat in consonance with *batha yogic* thinking. Both Richard Garbe and Charles Rockwell Lanman realized that live burials/*samadhis* had its root in *yoga*. Significantly, both these scholars identified Haridas as a *yogi* and not as a *fakir*—thereby rectifying an age-old mistake (Garbe 1900, 487; Lanman 1917, 148–149). Another early twentieth century writer who came closest to understanding live burial was John Campbell Oman. He was one of the first European authors to realize that Haridas's so-called "live burials" were *samadhis* in reality (Oman 1903, 44). Oman also recognized that "performing *samadhi* [*sidi*]" is a "well known practice amongst Hindu religious devotees" (1903, 46). He thereby acknowledged that Haridas's live burials were really religious activities. In this, Oman differed from many of his predecessors and contemporaries who refused to perceive the religious dimension of the live burials.<sup>45</sup>

To contemporary readers, it may seem strange that the majority in the West continued to see Haridas as a showman, even when people were beginning to become aware of the religious root of his live burials. Here, the stance of Mircea Eliade comes to mind. The renowned historian of religion dismissed Haridas as a fake holy man and a purveyor of cheap tricks even while acknowledging his mastery over *yoga* (Singleton 2010, 48). Notably, Haridas remains unnamed in Eliade's novella "The Secret of Dr. Honigberger" despite this work authenticating *samadhis* like his (1986).<sup>46</sup> It is clear that Eliade purposefully refused to give any importance to Haridas as a *yogi*. Why did the West continue to see the *yogi* as a showman? One may suggest some explanations. First, most Western scholars were prejudiced against the *batha yogis* in general due to their focus on "postural austerities" as opposed to philosophic contemplation (Singleton 2010, 43; Ondračka 2022, 578). They viewed them as fake holy men who took up live burials/*samadhis* as a kind of profession. Even Garbe and Oman did not dismiss this view (Garbe 1900, 486; Oman 1905, 43–44). Secondly, most early twentieth century writers, including Garbe and Lanman, accepted Braid's explanation in the end (Garbe 1900, *sic passim*; Lanman 1917, 149). As mentioned earlier, that theory effectively desacralized *samadhi* by presenting it as something mundane. Finally, by this time, Haridas's fame had encouraged professional showmen to imitate his feats on Western stages. Here one witnesses the final change in signification, as *samadhi* devolves from a religious practice to a stage spectacle. Though the early imitators were Indians like the duo Bhimsen Pratap and Gopal Krishna,

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<sup>45</sup> However, one should not infer that Oman was sympathetic to Haridas. He depreciated all forms of Hindu asceticism, or *sadhuism* as he called it, even while he studied these with academic curiosity.

<sup>46</sup> This novella was originally written in Romanian in 1939–40, as Eliade mentions (1986, viii). In the novella, a Romanian physician Dr. Zerlendi acquires *yogic* powers by following the procedures described in Honigberger's secret notes. Interestingly, Zerlendi's description of the state of his body during and after the "suspended animation" resembles early European narratives on Haridas in some details (Eliade 1986, 114–15; Honigberger 1852, 131).



foreigners later joined in—like the Egyptian Tehra Bey or the Italian Rahman Bey (Zubrzycki 2018, 131–132). Ordinary Europeans and Americans observed *samadhis* mainly on stages. Naturally, they came to look upon these only as spectacles. And Haridas, being *samadhis*' most well-known performer in the West, was therefore considered a showman.

Replications of live burials on Western stages finally ruined Haridas's reputation abroad. Before this, his *samadhis* were mostly seen as prodigious feats, even though he himself was regarded as a kind of stuntman. But the display of live burials as stage spectacles eventually led to the uncovering of many frauds. Both Bhimsen Pratap and Gopal Krishna, who posed as *yogis* from the Arya Samaj order,<sup>47</sup> were exposed as fraudsters in 1896 at Budapest. During a performance, Bhimsen Pratap was found breaking off his *samadhi* at night to furtively enjoy some bread and a bottle of milk (Garbe 1900, 481–82; “Minunile fakirilor” 1928, 9). Likewise, in Romania, Tehra Bey, misidentified as Thawara Ray, was exposed as a charlatan at Satu Mare in 1926. In his case, it was found that the coffin contained enough air to allow him to stay alive for half an hour (“Un vrajitor Indian in Ardeal” 1926, 8). In 1929, the Italian Pietro Blacaman, who masqueraded as “The Great Indian Fakir,” died during a performance at Argentina while trying to escape from a sealed coffin (Zubrzycki 2018, 132). The psychic researcher Hereward Carrington mentions that even in India a *fakir* practicing live burials was exposed as a con man ([1913] 2019, 42).<sup>48</sup> The exposure of these swindlers thus disenchanting people. However, a more severe blow to Haridas's prestige came from European magicians like Harry Houdini and John Nevil Maskelyne. Zubrzycki informs that Houdini performed “at least four versions of the trick” (2018, 131). He thereby debunked the belief that something extraordinary was involved in it. Maskelyne was even more scathing in his attacks, as both Goto-Jones and Zubrzycki point out (Goto-Jones 2016, 177; Zubrzycki 2018, 279–80). The exposure of the fraudsters and the demonstrations by Western magicians slowly convinced the Westerners that Haridas and his kind were simply swindlers. Losing interest in live burials, they quickly forgot Haridas.

One finds that Haridas became almost entirely forgotten by the latter half of the twentieth century. The damage to his reputation was so severe that even the Indians chose to ignore him. In fact, Singleton points out that his own disciple S. C. Vasu chose to expunge all references to his preceptor Haridas from the later edition of his *Gheranda Sambhita*, which he had earlier included in his 1895 edition (Singleton 2010, 47–48). Almost no mention of Haridas can be detected in late twentieth century writings. *Yoga* teachers and enthusiasts like Theos Bernard (1950) do not mention him. Interestingly, Lee Siegel does not name Haridas even when he cites Boileau's narrative in his 1991 book (1991, 168–69). This shows how thoroughly the West had forgotten Haridas by this time.

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<sup>47</sup> The Arya Samaj was a Hindu reform movement founded by the ascetic Swami Dayananda Saraswati. The movement called for the realignment of Hindu society and religion on the lines of the Vedas (see Majumdar, Raychaudhuri and Datta [1978] 2010, 873–74),

<sup>48</sup> Though Carrington does not outright dismiss Haridas's feats as improbable, he treats Wade's account with skepticism and calls for “better” evidence ([1913] 2019, 41).

## Conclusion

With the dawning of the twenty-first century, there has been a gradual revival of interest in Haridas's live burials. This proceeds from the emergence of new fields of studies like Yoga Studies and Magic Studies. All major twenty-first century studies on Indian magic mention Haridas; like Lamont and Bates's "Conjuring Images of India in Nineteenth-Century Britain" (2007, 314–15); Chris Goto-Jones's *Conjuring Asia* (2016, 176), and John Zubrzycki's *Jadoowallahs, Jugglers and Jinns* (127–29). These group of scholars consider Haridas only as a performing magician. They thereby fail to realize that live burial/*samadhi* is primarily a religious activity to a *yogi*. Incidentally, none of them identify Haridas as a *hatha yogi*. A better explanation of Haridas's live burials has been provided by scholars of Yoga Studies like James Mallinson and Mark Singleton. Both together and individually, they show that this practice has its root in religious beliefs. But Mallinson and Singleton's true area of research is *yoga*, as a whole, and they display less interest in Haridas as an individual. In this they do not differ from scholars of Magic Studies, who see Haridas only as a representative of his kind.

While contemporary science does not entirely rubbish the topic of human hibernation, it seems unlikely that any scientist of today would seriously study *hatha yogis* and *hatha yogic* practices to unravel the technique of inducing suspended animations. Instead, researchers of humanities and social sciences are more likely to take interest in such topics. Of course, their research cannot tell us anything about the efficacy of *yogic* practices and techniques. But these can explain how such practices originated, developed, and spread across the world. In a small way, this paper tries to add to existing knowledge by revealing how the *samadhis* of a *hatha yogi* were conceptualized in the West. By showing how Haridas's *samadhis* were misunderstood abroad, this paper exposes how cultural differences and unequal power relations affect the process of signification. It divulges how the West audaciously assigned a different meaning to Haridas's ascetic practices, without caring to find out the *yogi's* own views on the subject. This topic is therefore likely to draw attention of researchers studying cultural exchanges. Scholars studying interfaith relationship might also find Haridas an interesting case. As discussed in the paper, European narratives on his *samadhis* reveal the angst one faces while confronting an alien viewpoint which shakes one's core beliefs. This aspect may interest contemporary scholars. All in all, it is obvious that tales of Haridas's live burials still have much to offer. This makes the exhumation of his memory desirable in our age.

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