

ESSAYS | OPEN ESSAY

Fifty Shades Of Khaki

The real reason Pakistan banned Hamoodur Rehman’s report on the 1971 war



C Christine Fair



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Hamoodur Rehman and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto

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AFTER CONSOLIDATING POWER in the wake of the 1971 war, Chief Martial Law Administrator Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto established a commission to exposit the various causes of Pakistan’s defeat in the war that culminated in the loss of East Pakistan on December 16, 1971. The commission was headed by then Chief Justice Hamoodur Rehman. By the time it submitted its final report to the government on July 15, 1972, the Hamoodur Rehman Commission had interviewed more than 200 people during the investigation, some of which

was published in the culminating report which was heavily censored in Pakistan. Eleven out of 12 copies of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report were destroyed. The Pakistani government kept it secret for nearly three decades until 2000 when it was declassified only after parts of it were leaked by an Indian newspaper. It was subsequently published by Vanguard Books in 2001.

Bhutto ordered an investigation into a war that his own behaviour had precipitated by refusing to acknowledge the results of the 1970 general election in which the Awami League had secured an outright majority (162) of the 300 seats contested. Given that this election was for a constitutive assembly, the Awami League had a mandate to prosecute many of its election promises, such as greater decentralisation of power and separate currencies in the two wings. Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) won a meagre 80 seats, which was not enough to even veto what the Awami League may have proposed. It was widely known that Bhutto had collaborated in denying Sheikh Mujibur Rahman his victory with General Yahya Khan, the military leader who had followed General Ayub Khan in contravention of Pakistan's tattered constitution. Bhutto's constituting this commission seems a bit like a dacoit ordering a compliant police inquiry into his own crimes to exonerate himself of wrongdoing.

Most people—especially those who never read the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report—believe that successive Pakistani civilian and military regimes alike had kept the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report classified because it exposed the extent of the Pakistan army's atrocities in East Pakistan. Indeed, the report does concede that senior Pakistani officers looted banks and engaged in other property theft. It even recommends public trials and even court martial for some senior officials, which were never carried out. Those seeking a blow-by-blow account of the Pakistan army's rapacious and genocidal brutality during the war will be disappointed and are better off perusing scholarly accounts of the war, such as those authored by Gary Bass and Srinath Raghavan.

In fact, the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report exculpates the army of the most serious offences and outright rejects Mujibur Rahman's claim that troops raped 200,000 Bengali women. What is the dispositive evidence for rubbing this claim? The report notes that "[T]he abortion team [Mujibur] had commissioned from Britain in early 1971 found that its workload involved the termination of only a hundred or more pregnancies" (page 513). It also cast aside the claims of the Bangladesh government that the army killed three million Bengalis as "altogether fantastic and fanciful" (page 513). Instead, the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report proffered the figure, supplied by the Pakistan army, to be approximately 26,000 deaths (page 513). In contrast, it alleged that "Awami League Militants" were far more barbarous and accused them of slaughtering between 100,000 and 500,000 of "helpless Biharis, West Pakistanis and patriotic Bengalis living in East Pakistan" during the war (page 508).

Given that the report whitewashed the army's atrocities, why was it kept out of the view of the Pakistani public until 2000? The answer may surprise you: General Yahya Khan seemed to have had a penchant for cuckolding officers in every one of Pakistan's armed forces. Bhutto was shrewd. After the war, the Pakistan army was disgraced. That's where Bhutto wanted to keep it. However, Bhutto knew that he could not rule forever by humiliating the army

Given that the report whitewashed the army’s atrocities, which were covered more honestly by every major newspaper covering the war, why was it zealously kept out of the view of the Pakistani public until 2000? The answer may surprise you: General Yahya Khan seemed to have had a penchant for cuckolding officers in every one of Pakistan’s armed forces as well as several civilian organisations. Let me explain.

Bhutto was shrewd. After the war, the Pakistan army was disgraced and retreated to its barracks with its tail between its legs. That’s where Bhutto wanted to keep it. However, Bhutto knew that he could not rule forever by humiliating the army. For this reason, he tried to cultivate good relations with the army by investing in its capitalisation and by pursuing nuclear weapons. This means that even Bhutto had an incentive to keep the salacious tales of the rapacious sexual appetite of the army’s then leader from the prying eyes of his public. However, his demands to use the army to keep down any political opposition and his eventual formation of a private security force to do his dirty work proved to be his undoing. Not only did General Zia-ul-Haq oust him following his coup, he was tried, convicted and hanged on murder charges.

President’s House Rawalpindi				Annexure ‘B
S No.	Name	Date	Time	Remarks
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Begum Brig Sharif	2.5.69	6.40pm	Information ADC,
2.	Begum Brig Sharif with one woman	4.5.69	8.55pm	-do-
3.	Begum Kamal	7.5.69	6.10pm	Inform: Nek Muhammad Havaladar
4.	Begum Kamal	8.5.69	8.05pm	-do-
5.	Begum Gen Naseem; Begum Commissioner; Begum Pirzada, Begum Moinuddin, Begum Col Raza and Begum Daar.	9.5.69	10.30am	-do-
6.	Begum Kamal	9.5.69	6.20pm	Inform: ADC.
7.	Begum Kamal	9.5.69	7.15pm	-do-
8.	Gen Hamid with one woman	9.5.69	7.45pm	-do-
9.	Begum Hamid	10.5.69	7.30pm	-do-
10.	President of Pak left (without programme)	11.5.69	7.45pm/in	
11.	Begum Gen Shahid Ahmad	12.5.69	1.15am/out	
12.	Begum Gen Hamid	17.5.69	7.55pm/in	Inform: ADC
			11.10/out	Inform: Naik Mohammad Hussain
13.	Begum Kamal	21.5.69	10.15am(in)	Mohd. Aziz Peon
		22.5.69	1.30pm(out)	
14.	Begum Ikramullah Khan	24.5.69	1.00pm	Inform: Majid Ahmed
15.	Begum Admiral Hassan, Begum Yousuf	3.6.69	7.00pm	ADC
16.	Begum Admiral Hassan, Begum Yousuf	4.6.69	9.45am	-do-
17.	Mst Qutub	6.6.69	11.00am	Col Rashid
18.	Mr Inamul Haq with Begum, Gen Hamid with Begum	9.6.69	8.15pm	Inform: ADC
19.	President of Pak left with Gen Hamid (without programme)	10.6.69	1.30pm(out)	
20.	Begum Gen Riaz, Begum Gen Pirzada, Begum Gen Mian, Begum Dr Intiaz, Begum Inamur Rehman	12.6.69	8.30am(in)	Inform: Asstt. Secretary Ghafur
21.	Begum Inamur Rahman	12.6.69	10.30am	Inform: ADC
22.	Begum Inamur Rahman	12.6.69	7.50pm	Inform: ADC
23.	Govt Vehicle with some ladies guest	13.6.69	8.25 am (in)	-do-
		14.6.69	10.00pm	Inform: Nek Muhammad Havaladar
24.	Maj-Gen Rafi with his Begum	14.6.69	10.00pm	Inform: ADC
25.	Begum Noon	15.6.69	12.30pm(in)	Inform: PA.

OF THE 545-PAGE BOOK, the most underreported is Chapter 26: ‘The Moral Aspect’ (pages 285-312). This chapter provides evidentiary support for a number of claims made earlier in Chapter 8 (‘Analysis of the Intentions of General Yahya Khan and His Associations’, pages 117-125). Chapter 8 makes for fascinating reading. It details how no one anticipated the Awami League’s victory and provides glimpses into the constitution that Yahya Khan himself was drafting. This draft constitution was given to the press on December 16, 1970 with instructions that it not be published until authorised (page 121). This was cited as an example of the “mental unreality of the world in which General Yahya Khan was then living” (page 122). He insisted upon promulgating his constitution throughout December 1970.

But this is nothing compared to the other savage revelations of this chapter, namely that:

“All who came closely in contact with the General have unanimously deposed that the General is a heavy drinker. This is not, however, something which happened suddenly after he purported to become President but has been a feature of his personal life for a long time before that.... We cannot help feeling that... such heavy drinking must have had some effect upon his mental reflexes and we should have thought that a person who had to carry the heavy loads of both the Presidentship and the leadership of the armed forces, would have needed to be more alert especially during so critical a period as war” (page 122, emphasis added).

The Moral Aspect					307
President's House Karachi					Annexure 'C'
S No.	Name	Date	Time	Remarks	
1	2	3	4	5	
1.	Mrs Hamid	19.9.69	10.45am	Inform: Nek Muhammad	
2.	Mrs Shirazi	20.9.69	12.40pm	-do-	
3.	Mrs Bilgrami with 2 women	27.9.69	5.00pm	Inform: ADC	
4.	Mr Hamid with Begum	-do-	6.00pm	Nek Muhammad Havaladar	
5.	Begum Shirazi	-do-	5.05pm	-do-	
6.	3 persons with one woman	26.10.69	8.10pm	-do-	
7.	Ahmad Shirazi with children	27.10.69	6.15pm	-do-	
8.	Ahmad Hussain with Begum	-do-	6.35pm	-do-	
9.	One lady Captain in uniform	28.10.69	8.10am	-do-	
10.	Begum M M Agha	-do-	10.00am	Inform: ADC	
11.	Yusuf Bhava with a woman	1.11.69	11.35am	Inform: Mushtaq	
12.	Bilgrami with 2 women	4.11.69	7.25pm	Nek Muhammad Hvi	
13.	Said Zaman with Begum	6.11.69	1.50m	Inform: ADC	
14.	Begum Said	-do-	6.15pm	Nek Muhammad	
15.	Usman Aminuddin with Begum	-do-	7.00pm	-do-or Begums	
16.	Lt Naeem with Begum	7.11.69	5.15pm	Inform: ADC	
17.	Sajjad Abbas with Begum	-do-	11.52am	Nek Muhammad	
18.	Sqn-Ldr Jadoon with Begum	25.1.70	7.35pm	Infm: ADC	
19.	Begum Aisha, Begum Ahsan, Begum Hamid, Umar with Begum	25.1.70	7.35pm	-do-	
20.	Mr Javaid Mirza with Begum	26.10.70	1.40pm	-do-	
21.	Mrs Shirazi	-do-	12.00am	-do-	
22.	Bismullah Begum	-do-	2.50pm	-do-	
23.	Aisha Begum	27.1.70	7.10pm	Nek Muhammad	
24.	Begum Aisha	28.1.70	6.50pm	-do-	
25.	Mrs Zuhra Shirazi	29.1.70	12.30pm	-do-	
26.	Mr Tasawar with Begum	-do-	7.00pm	Inform: ADC	
27.	Mr Hamid,Mst Razia Nizam, U A Syed Ahmed Shirazi, Sadaruddin, Usman with Havildar Begums, Shafiq Usman with Begums	30.1.70	8.30am	Nek Muhammad	
28.	Ahmad Shirazi with Begum, Mr Hamid and Begum	-do-	8.00pm	-do-	
29.	Lt Naeem Ahmad with Begum	19.2.70	5.50 m	Inform: ADC	
30.	Begum Roshan Ara, Hamid	-do-	6.50pm	Nek Muhammad	
31.	Begum Hamid Khan	20.2.70	9.20am	-do-	
32.	Begum, Col Sehgal	-do-	9.15pm	-do-	
33.	Begum Roshan Hamid	-do-	10.20pm	-do-	
34.	Begum Sher Ali	21.2.70	11.50am	Inform: ADC	
35.	Begum Majeed Ullah	21.2.70	4.10pm	-do-	
36.	Begum Yusuf with Mr Yusuf	-do-	7.00pm	-do-	
37.	Mr Sadaruddin,sister& Begum	23.2.70	7.45pm	Inf: Hafiz Ahmed	

The commission found no “evidence, whatsoever, to indicate that this weakness on the part of the General had any other effect upon his official conduct.” Nonetheless, the commission observed that “in the critical days of the war he did not visit the operation room more than twice” (page 122). This would not have been comforting news to the nearly 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war who would be detained in India, much less to the families of those who lost loved ones or whose family members came back with physical or other disabilities.

However, the report is unrelenting. It dilates upon a facet of his private life concerning women, notably that:

“There is plenty of evidence to indicate that the General was far from being an austere man sexually. The number with whom he had illicit relations is unfortunately all too large. One of these in fact even stayed as a guest in the President’s State Guest House and on at least one occasion the President was found missing from his own house and was later discovered in the house of this very lady before she had taken up residence in the Guest House. We regret to find that he had in fact showered upon her favours in the course of official business, as for instance, when he appointed both her husband and herself as Pakistan’s Ambassadors abroad. Other cases have come to light when he intervened on behalf of certain ladies to provide for them industrial licenses or extraordinary funds for visits abroad and in one case a senior government official was dismissed for failure to comply with the President’s wishes expeditiously. In this sense, therefore his relations with women did interfere with the official conduct of business (page 122).



Yahya Khan (Photo: Getty Images)

Despite these promiscuous tendencies, the commission noted that while “We are limited to the cause which led to the surrender in East Pakistan and ceasefire in West Pakistan and we are unable to find any evidence that the General’s relation with any women contributed in the slightest degree in these matters, except that even in the gravest hour of the country’s difficulties, his mind was not disturbed enough to make him deviate from his usual course of debauchery” (page 123). While Pakistan’s army chiefs are renowned for their rumoured Lothario ways, this is not the kind of information any army officer or jawan wants to see in print about his chief much less any other member of any other security force put in harm’s way during the war.

The report is unrelenting. It dilates upon a facet of Yahya Khan’s private life: ‘There is plenty of evidence to indicate that the General was far from being an austere man sexually. The number with whom he had illicit relations is unfortunately all too large... In this sense, therefore his relations with women did interfere with the official conduct of business’

Unfortunately, this is merely scratching the surface of his sexual exploits. Some of the pithiest observations are found in Chapter 26. The commission observes that:

“The most damaging allegation against the former President and the Commander-in-Chief is that he was leading an extremely licentious life, devoting most of his time to wine and women. We have already mentioned elsewhere that during the fateful days of the war the General stopped attending even his Presidential Office, and did not visit the Operations Room in General Headquarters on more than two or three occasions. Of course, he took up the position that he was kept fully in the picture by daily evening briefings at his resident [sic]. That such a method of work was not likely to produce the best results has already been stated. In the present context we wish to refer to the fact that there is evidence to show that the General was addicted to heavy drinking, and was extremely friendly with a number of ladies of indifferent repute who took a lot of his time even during the critical days of the war and during the period immediately preceding the war” (page 289).

The report then proceeds to identify a number of famous women by name, including Begum Shameem KN Hussain wife of an inspector general of police from East Pakistan; the Begum of Junagadh; the famous singer Madam Noor Jehan; Mst Aqleem Akhtar known as “General Rani”, wife of a petty police official named Raza; Nazli Begum, wife of businessperson of Karachi; Mrs Mansoor Hirjee; Mst Zainab, ex-wife of Major General (retired) Latif Khan; another Mst Zainab, ex-wife of Malik Sir Khizar Hayat Khan Tiwana; Mst Anwara Begum, an industrialist of Dhaka; Mst Lily Khan of Dhaka; and Mst Laila Muzammil, presumably of Dhaka.



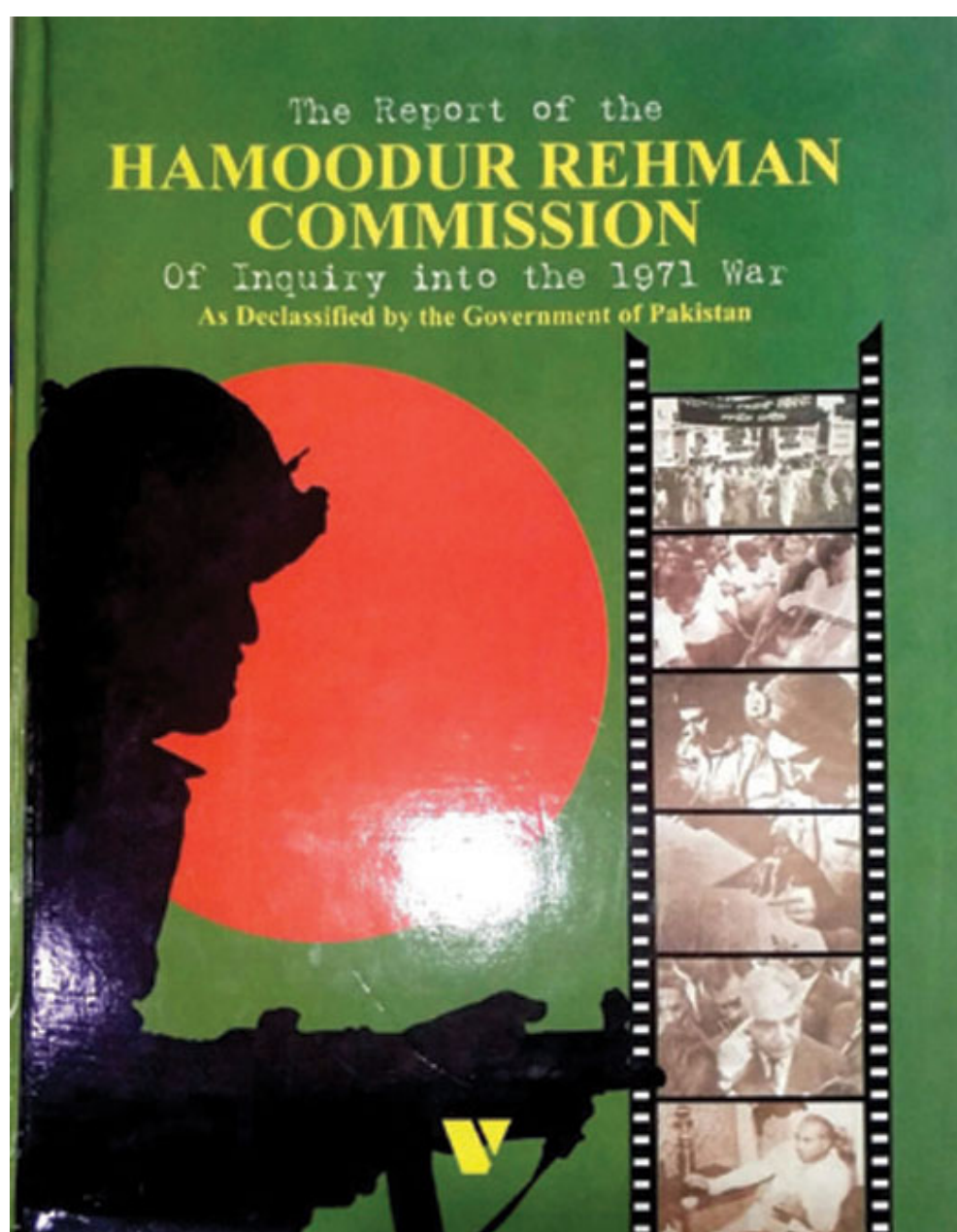
Indian soldiers celebrate in Dhaka on December 16, 1971 (Photo: Getty Images)

It appears as if even his own military secretary was disturbed by his relations with these varied women. His military secretary told the commission that “I used to recite verses from Qur’an to warn him (General Yahya Khan) that a person brings about his ruination through his own actions” (page 290). When asked by the commission whether Yay Khan’s behaviour affected his ability to take decisions, Major General Mohammed Ishaque stated that “prohibition b Allah is with a definite purpose and overindulgence in these vices has direct bearing on one’s thinking and judgment (page 290). Another insight comes from NA Rizvi, who was serving as director of the Intelligence Bureau. When asked if he believed former President Yahya Khan had maintained the dignity of his office in his conduct in public and private, Rizvi stated: “I am the only man who told the president that you hold a very high post and you have an obligation on you [sic]. I even said that I was going to make a request to his Begum Sahiba to go with him to every place where he went” (page 290). These witnesses provide evidence that there were in fact protests against his dissolute behaviour from officials who would ordinarily be expected to remain quiet.

Most people believe that successive Pakistani civilian and military regimes alike had kept the Hamoodur Rehman Commission Report classified because it exposed the extent of the Pakistan army’s atrocities in East Pakistan. Those seeking a blow-by-blow account of the Pakistan army’s rapacious and genocidal brutality during the war will be disappointed

However, this text understates the magnitude of Yahya Khan's lascivious ways. In keeping with British tradition, there were registries at both the president's houses in Rawalpindi as well as in Karachi. All guests coming into the residence had to register their names in the registry as well as the date and the time of their arrival. In Chapter 26, there are in fact two annexes that detail the numbers of women who visited Yahya Khan at either of his residences. Annexure B details Yahya Khan's visitors at the president's house in Rawalpindi while Annexure C details his visitors at the president's house in Karachi. As the detailed accounts in both registries attest, while many of the women appeared to indicate that they were the wives of civilians, many yet were the wives of senior officials in Pakistan's armed forces and other security agencies.

ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, multiple women visited the general. For example, Begum General Hamid along with Begum Anwar Issa visited the general on April 19, 1971 at 7:20PM and departed at 11:40PM. On May 2, Begum General Latif and Begum Gul Nawaz visited the president at 8:00PM. There is no indication of the time they left. On September 9, 1971, Begum General Shahid Ahmed visited Yahya Khan at 7:00PM, departing at 12:05 in the morning. There are in fact too many visitors to detail. Annexure B, which details the entries for Yahya Khan's residence in Rawalpindi, begins with an entry on May 2, 1969 on page 296 and ends on page 306 with the last entry dated December 18, 1971. Each page details about 30-35 entries.



Annexure C, which details visitors to Yahya Khan's house in Karachi, begins on page 207 and ends on page 312, with each page detailing approximately 40 entries. Whereas Annexure B indicates that many of his visitors were the wives of senior military officers, Annexure C suggests that most of his lady friends were the wives of civilians, with notable exceptions. It must also be noted that we cannot simply infer that all of his nocturnal female visitations were for prurient purposes; however it is difficult to otherwise explain what these associates were doing at the residences so late in the evening. It should also be noted that many of his lady friends visited him during office hours, when one would expect the president and army chief to be attending to the affairs of the state or war. It should also be noted that not all of the visitors in Annexures B and C were women. As the report indicated no interest in men, one must assume that these were legitimate visits pertaining to his positions in government, or alternatively, seeking favours from him in this same capacity.

The Pakistani government kept the report secret until 2000 when it was declassified only after parts of it were leaked by an Indian newspaper. It was subsequently published in 2001. I believe that these revelations about Yahya Khan’s conduct with innumerable women are the real reason this report was hidden for nearly three decades

While Annexures B and C detail General Yahya Khan’s varied visitors, the commission’s report is forced to lamentably note that:

“It is indeed a national tragedy that it was not general Yaya Khan alone who was afflicted with these maladies. The evidence shows that his chief of staff, general Abdul Hamid Khan, was a frequent partner with him in many of these adventures. Even the entries in the gate register are enough to show their constant association, but the matter is placed beyond doubt by the testimony of the personal staff of the President’s house. It transpires that frequently general Yahya Khan and Gen Abdul Hamid Khan would slip out to General Yahya’s house in Harley Street, Rawalpindi, for the purpose of meeting some of their female friends” (page 29).

And indeed, the evidence presented in Annexures B and C sustains this allegation.

I believe that these revelations about Yahya Khan’s drunken and rakish conduct with innumerable women—many of whom were the wives of senior military personnel—are the real reason this report was hidden for nearly three decades. It remains a mystery to me why it is that until now no one has written about these adventures of Yahya Khan, preferring instead to sustain the ruse that the commission report’s most incendiary revelations are about the conduct of the Pakistan army in the east.

It’s clear that this report provides a detailed account of the senior armed service personnel who were cuckolded by Yahya Khan, in many cases repeatedly. Even Zulfikar Ali Bhutto couldn’t bring himself to humiliate the armed force in this way. Had it not been leaked in part by the Indian media, I suspect the report would still be shrouded in obscurity.

(Views are personal)

1971 India–Pakistan War Bangladesh Hamoodur Rehman Pakistan Army politic Yahya Khan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto



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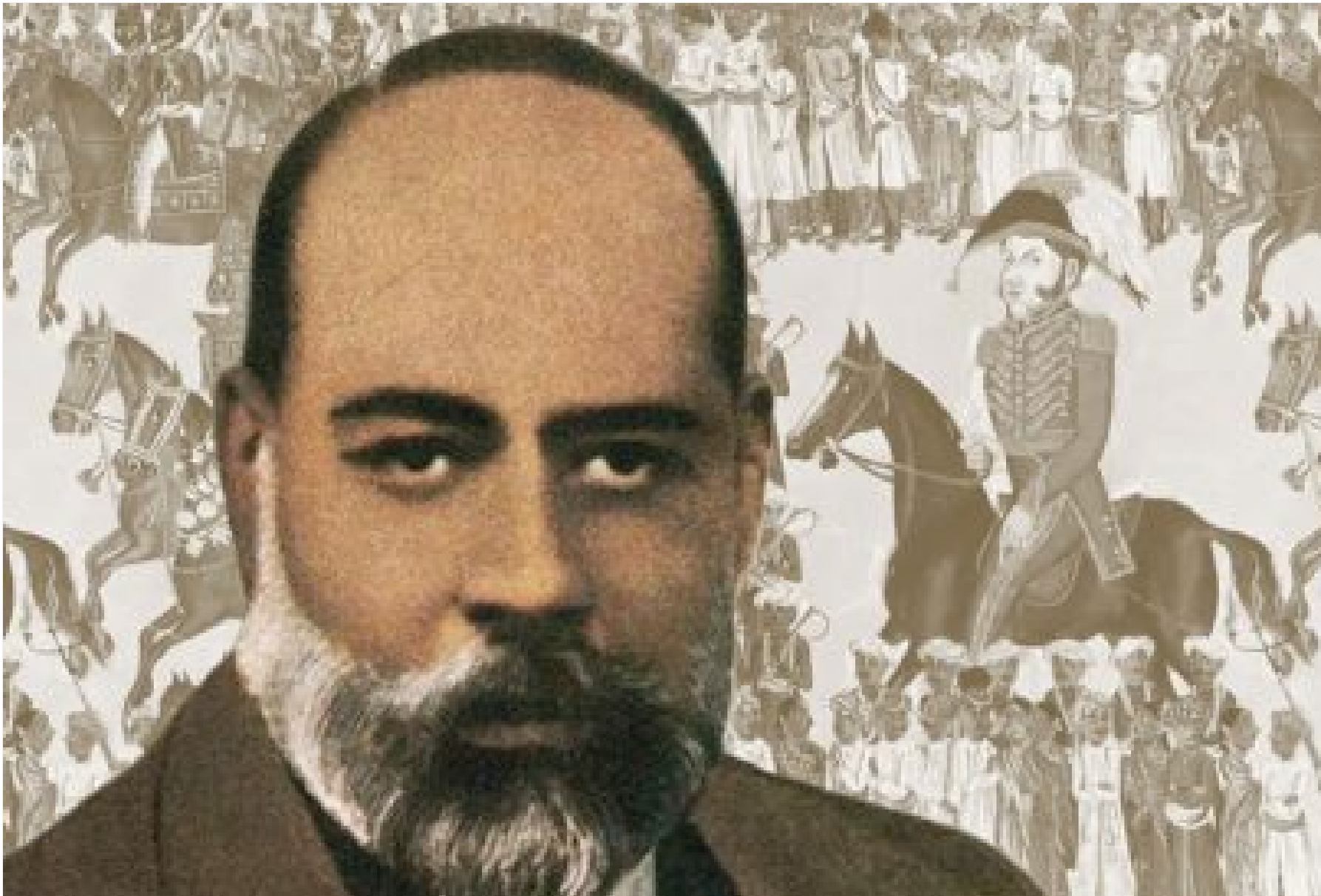
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