CHAPTER-THREE

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After having studied Byron’s Oriental diction, let us turn to Byron’s Oriental characters in *Don Juan*. Generally speaking, these Oriental characters are presented as tyrants and authoritarian. His Oriental characters are presented as inferiors to Christians. But in *Don Juan*, to a greater extent, he portrays his Oriental characters positively. For instance, Sultana Gulbeyaz surrenders completely to Don Juan, though at the cost of her chastity. Besides, Byron’s Oriental characters are given to violence and bloodshed. They are seen as unethical, indulging in polygamy, buying and selling women and slaves. Disparaging remarks are passed against them. But in *Don Juan*, these Oriental characters receive a little admiration for their moral strength. Other than Don Juan, they are perceived as despicable and ignominious and disciples of the devil. My purpose in this Chapter is to examine Byron’s Oriental characters and their conformity to the Oriental stereotypes in English literature. An attempt has also been made to explore how Byron enters into the attitude and feelings of his Oriental characters. The characters are presented alphabetically which seemed as the most appropriate approach to their study.

BABA

Baba is a Turkish/Persian word, which stands for “father”. In Turkey it also denotes “grand father”. Baba is used in various ways as honorific title for older men, and in Turkey it is used as a form of address even today. As part of a name, it is best known for the story of “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” in *The
Arabian Nights. The epithet Baba is used also of non-religious civil servants in the Ottoman empire, as for example, Agha Babasi of the imperial harem, who was white eunuchs. In Iran the epithet Baba precedes the name, frequently in the case of darwesh, an equivalent of a spiritual master such as the mystic poet Baba Tahir Uryan. Occasionally, Baba appears on in its own. For instance, a member of the Khan family Giray the Crimea, Baba Girey, son of Muhammad Giray, who after the death of his father, succeeded him as Kalgha; as also the Uzbek prince Baba Beg.

Byron’s Baba, in Don Juan, is an Oriental character who is very active. He embodies Oriental culture. He has attained the age of thirty. He is a healthy and hearty person. Besides, he is a man of firm nature:

A man of thirty, rather stout and hale,

With resolution in his dark grey eye,

(V, 10)

He is well built. He has fresh healthy and reddish colour. His hair is not black rather having the colour of toasted bread, or coffee mixed with milk. He has a sanguine arm, which is indicative of his sound health. He is a man of tranquil nature. In other words, he is portrayed as a man of impressive stature:

He had an English look; that is, was square

In make, of a complexion white and ruddy

Good teeth, with curling rather dark brown hair,

And, it might be from thought or toil or study,
An open brow a little marked with care.

One arm had on a bondages rather bloody;

And there he stood with such sang-froid that greater

Could scarce be shown even by a mere spectator.

(V, 11)

Baba is brave and healthy, and sympathetic towards others. In the slave-market, when Juan sees Baba he is frightened, though he is courageous. But very soon Baba begins to shower his commiseration on Juan's misfortune:

But seeing at his elbow a mere lad,

Of a high spirit evidently, though

At present weighed down by a doom which had

O'erthrown even men, he soon began to show

A kind of blunt compassion for the sad

Lot of so young a partner in the woe,

(V, 12)

Moreover, he is an experienced person. When Baba meets Juan he inquires of his origin, assuming that Juan cannot be a Greek. The dialogue between Baba and Juan clearly brings out the universal truth that fortune plays a great role in our life. We all are victims of circumstances as is evident from their dialogue. Through Baba's speech it is revealed that fortune has a sundry role to play. Sometimes it acts as a preserver and at others as destroyer. Nothing can
be said positively of anyone’s fortune. Baba’s speech reflects his experience:

When Juan answered, ‘Spanish’, he replied,

‘I thought in fact you could not be a Greek;

Those servile dogs are not so proudly eyed.

Fortune has played you here a pretty freak,

But that’s her way with all men till they’re tried;

But never mind, she’ll turn, perhaps, next week,

She has served me also much the same as you,

Except that I have found it nothing new’.

(V, 14)

Baba is a man of consoling nature. He has grown kind-hearted because of his sufferings, which is clear from his solacing Juan. For some months he served the Russian army, ‘I served for some months with the Russian army here and there’, (V, 15). He is not too worried over his present condition, rather over the past when he loved a maid. He is a man of kind nature. When Juan’s eyes appeared wet, he makes efforts to relieve his pain. The following lines clearly bring out Baba’s role in relieving Juan’s pain:

I cried upon my first wife’s dying day ,

And also when my second run away.

‘My third –’ ‘Your third!’ Quoth Juan, turning round,
'You scarcely can be thirty, have you three?'

'No, only two at present above ground.

Surely' this nothing wonderful to see

One person thrice in holy wedlock bound!

'Well then your third,' said Juan, what did she?

She did not run away too, did she, sir?'

'No, faith'. 'What then?' 'I ran away from her'.'

(V, 19 and 20)

Baba is experienced and he is a man of cool-temperament as well. He keeps on persuading Juan. He tells him that colours of his own life are gone. But Juan has still time to ameliorate his condition. Baba never loses his mental equilibrium. He takes things very calmly or coolly. He hints at the volatile nature of time. when life is new, it is pregnant with warm feelings and emotions. But, with the passage of time, everything fades. Likewise, Baba's passions are on decline. But for Juan, suggests Baba, life is quite new. So, he keeps on urging Juan not to lose heart:

'You take things coolly, Sir,' said Juan. 'Why,?'

Replied the other, 'what can a man do?

There still are many rainbows in your sky,

But mine have vanished. All, when life is new,

Commence with feelings warm and prospects high;
But time strips our illusions of their hue,
And one by one in turn, some grand mistake
Casts off its bright skin yearly like the snake.

(V, 21)

Through Baba's character Byron suggests that experiences in life are obtained after a particular age, as is the case with Baba:

Knowledge at least is gained; for instance, now
We know what slavery is, and our disasters
May teach us better to behave when masters.'

(V, 23)

Baba is an old black eunuch. In his dress, vocabulary and outlook he appears as a genuine Oriental. Moreover, his dress, vocabulary and outlook conform to the practice of Oriental culture, suitable for the harem:

I wish to be perspicuous. And the black,
I say, unlocking the recess, pulled forth
A quantity of clothes fit for the back
Of any Mussulman, whate'er his worth,
And of variety there was no lack,
And yet though I have said there was no dearth,
He chose himself to point out what he thought
Most proper for the Christians he had bought.

(V, 67)

The dress items used by Baba for the Christians whom he has brought – 'candiote cloak', 'trousers not so tight', 'shawl,' and cashmere, are of special interest, which reveal him as an Oriental fond of Oriental culture:

The suit he thought most suitable to each

Was, for the elder and the stouter, first

A candiote cloak, which to the knee might reach,

And trousers not so tight that they would burst,

But such as fit an Asiatic breech,

A shawl, whose folds in Cashmere had been nurst,

Slippers of saffron, dagger rich and handy;

In short, all things which form a Turkish dandy.

(V, 68)

Not only in dress but also in the use of the language Baba appears as a thorough Oriental. This viewpoint is corroborated by the observation of M.K. Joseph: "Baba is polite authority."¹ Significantly enough, Oriental expressions are employed by him only during the custody period. In harem, he is willing to protect the two Christians – Johnson and Juan, whom he bought from the slave market of Constantinople. Undoubtedly, he can be considered as the protector of these two slaves. He perceives slaves in terms of circumstances which is
clear from his discreet statement in which he asks them to embrace Islam in order to better their condition:

> While he was dressing, Baba, their black friends
> Hinted the vast advantages which they
> Might probably obtain both in the end,
> If they would but pursue the proper way
> Which fortune plainly seemed to recommend;
> And then he added that he needs must say
> 'T would greatly tend to better their condition,
> If they would condescend to circumcision.

(V, 69)

In creating Oriental atmosphere in *Don Juan*, Byron appears at his sharpest in relating the advantages of embracing Islam. Baba helps Juan to dress like a princess. Even in feminine disguise in Oriental palace Juan reflects the Muslim culture, of which Baba is aware:

> The Negro Baba helped a little too,
> When some untoward part of raiment stuck hard;
> And wrestling both his arms into a gown,
> He paused and took a survey up and down

(V, 78)
When Juan is dressed like a princess in the harem, one problem still persists. His hair is not long enough. But it is Baba, the resourceful eunuch, who provides many false long hair of a woman, and Juan's head is fully covered as that of a girl. Juan is disguised because of the Oriental atmosphere in order to hide his own identity, disclosure of which might be disastrous:

One difficulty still remained; his hair

Was hardly long enough, but Baba found

So many false long tresses all to spare

That soon his head was most completely crowned,

After the manner then in fashion there.

(V, 79)

Every occupant of the harem, which is obvious from the above passage, is supposed to have long hair which is in fashion there. Byron seems to suggest that every Muslim lady after a certain age should have long hair which may sometime act like a veil, for hiding the face or sometimes the whole body.

It is Baba who has the adroitness to disguise somebody as a half Muslim or as a girl. He seems to be a magician who offers somebody delight:

One's turned half Mussulman, and one a maid,

By this old black enchanter's unsought aid.

(V, 83)

In the Oriental palace, Baba moves Juan forward, from place to place
through attractive galleries:

Baba led Juan onwards room by room

Through glittering galleries and o'er marble floors,

Till a gigantic portal through the gloom,

Haughty and huge, along the distance lowers;

And wafted far arose a rich perfume.

(V, 85)

Not only does he lead Juan in the palace, rather he seems like a watchdog who always keeps an eye on him. He is very protective towards him. He is, as said earlier, very compassionate. He always imparts certain guidelines to Juan in the Oriental palace. Baba acts like Juan's guide and mentor:

Before they entered, Baba paused to hint

To Juan some slight lessons as his guide.

(V, 91)

The name Baba, given to the black eunuch, is aptly used by Byron. Baba plays his role superbly and Byron's motive of creating the Oriental ambience cannot be ruled out. "In all the characters except the hero, Byron relies more on description than on analysis; the character is given complete in a rapid and brilliant initial description, an incisive outline boldly filled in with colour and detail." Byron's Oriental characters are of paramount significance. Baba plays his role as a fatherly figure as his name signifies. So, his name is best suited for such an Oriental character.
Inside the palace, the eunuch dresses his captives – Johnson in Turkish finery, and Juan as an odalisque for the seraglio. This comic scene gives place quickly to the drama of the interview between Sultana Gulbeyaz and Juan, interrupted at the close of the Canto V by the arrival of the Sultan and his courtiers.

In the seraglio scene, there are certain digressions which are asides of the poet on the courtships in hot climates, and on the inability of the royalty to understand the feelings of their subjects. Through Oriental characters Byron satirizes the spiritual hollowness of royalty. They do not realize the feelings and sentiments of their subjects.

As to Baba, his outstanding feature is his adroitness. He manages things very well. In palatial building where the ceremony is going on, he bows his head until the ceremony concludes. He acts according to the situation:

In this imperial hall at distance lay
Under a canopy and there reclined
Quite in confidential queenly way,
A lady. Baba stopped and kneeling signed
To Juan, who thought not much used to pray,
Knelt down by instinct, wondering in his mind
What all this meant, while Baba bowed and bended
His head, until the ceremony ended.

(V, 95)
In the Oriental palace, when all the girls or young unmarried women have retired, Baba goes to Juan and directs him to go to the Sultana Gulbeyaz and kiss her foot which was abruptly declined. Probably, Juan's life would be safe by kissing Sultana's foot as was the custom. So, it can be reckoned that Baba's approach is realistic. He is down-to-earth:

Baba, when all the damsels were withdrawn,
Motioned to Juan to approach and then
A second time desired him to kneel down
And kiss the lady's foot, which maxim when
He heard repeated, Juan with a frown
Drew himself up to his full height again
And said it grieved him, but he could not stoop
To any shoe, unless it shod the Pope.

(V, 102)

To invest Baba with all the positive qualities could not be appropriate on Byron's part. After all, he is also a human being. And there is not a single man who is infallible. So is Baba. In harem when Juan refuses to kiss the Sultana's foot, Baba fumes. Then he mutters a threat which is also ignored by Juan. Ultimately, he asks Juan to kiss the lady's hand:

At length perceiving the 'foot' could not stand,
Baba proposed that he should kiss the hand.
Baba is an amalgam of positive and negative features. He is a blend of virtues and vices. Moreover, he is full of commiseration. In the Oriental palace, when he asks Juan to kiss Sultana's foot or hand, it is not proper on moral ground. So, his suggestion would be unethical. But traditionally and circumstantially, he is right. As such, he has become the victim of circumstances. "There is monotony in Byron's characters and commonplace even in their crimes."\(^3\) Byron, by portraying Baba, seems to suggest that we all are victims of circumstances which is a universal truth. And by his act Baba exhibits his love and compassion for Juan:

The lady eyed him o'er and o'er and bade
Baba retire, which he obeyed in style,
As if well used to the retreating trade;
And taking hints in good part all the while,
He whispered Juan not to be afraid,
And looking on him with a sort of smile,
Took leave, with such a face of satisfaction,
As good men wear who have done a virtuous action.

From the above passage, it is manifest that Baba is very obedient. He obeys Sultana's dictates failing which will be disastrous for him. Apart from that, he is a very sage man. He is known for his prudence. Whatever Gurbeyaz
desires and commands, he obeys coolly:

And Baba, who had ne'er been known to fail,
In any kind of mischief to be wrought,
At all such auctions knew how to prevail,
She had no prudence, but he had; and this
Explains the garb which Juan took amiss.

(V, 114)

He tackles things tactfully. He is candid in nature. In the seraglio scene, where Gulbeyaz is worried about Juan’s disguise and his spending night, he takes the matter coolly and placates Gulbeyaz’s anger and requests her to listen to him. He is unable to help himself in relating the matter to her. Gulbeyaz is incensed, he reveals the fact that Juan was given to Dudu, a languishing and lazy girl whose beauty would attract many beholders. With Dudu Juan spent the night. Further, he pleads his innocence for what took place was not because of him, which is true:

When Baba saw these symptoms, which he knew
To bode him no great good, he deprecated
Her anger and beseeched she’d hear him through.
He could not help the thing which he related.
Then out it came at length that to Dudu
Juan was given in charge, as hath been stated,
But not by Baba’s fault, he said, and swore on

The holy camel’s hump, besides the Koran.

(vi, 102)

In terms of vocabulary and outlook, Byron’s Baba is thoroughly Oriental. He makes no mistake about the side he takes; he leaves no stone unturned in playing his role, especially in harem. It is Baba who discloses the truth that owing to Dudu’s dream, which was not a joke, Juan’s disguise was exposed and he was thrown into the sea in a sack.

One striking point about the above passage (vi, 102) is the intensity of the local colour lent by Baba as he expresses his moving account of ‘the holy camel’s hump’, and ‘the Koran’. His view about the Qur’an, the most sacred book of Muslims, and ‘camel’s hump’ is not off the mark. The camel’s hump which is considered holy among Muslims is because of Prophet Muhammad’s association with it. Here Byron displays positive attitude towards Muslims and his knowledge regarding Oriental religious sensitivities is accurate.

Baba is a man of rich experience. He is not only a guide and mentor of Juan, he guides Gulbeyaz too, where it becomes mandatory on his part. When Baba is ordered by Gulbeyaz to bring two slaves, especially Juan, he suggests her to revoke her order, though he, too, is her slave. Being her slave he is bound to obey her commands but he advises her sincerely. He plays multifaceted roles. Here he appears as advisor to Gulbeyaz. He rightly suggests to her that a violent and hasty decision might be ominous to her:

‘To hear is to obey,’ he said, ‘but still,
Sultana, think upon the consequence.

It is not that I shall not all fulfil

Your orders even in their severest sense,

But such precipitation may end ill

Even at your own imperative expense.

I do not mean destruction and exposure

In case of any premature disclosure,

(vi, 114)

From the above passage, it is clear that Baba is far-sighted; he is a man of sacrificing nature. He does not want to jeopardise others for his sake which is evident from the following lines:

This awkward business without harm to others,

He still preferred his own neck to another's.

(vi, 116)

As to Byron's sketch of Baba, it is worth remembering that he is a neutral character who follows Gulbeyaz's command and goes to his office silently. He frowns and scowls upon ladies, especially sultanas and the path adopted by them regarding their stubbornness, vanity and lack of decision making:

Away he went then upon his commission,

Growling and grumbling in good Turkish phrase
Against all women of whate'er condition,

Especially sultanas and their ways,

Their obstinacy, pride, and indecision,

Their never knowing their own mind two days,

The trouble that they gave, their immorality,

Which made him daily bless his own neutrality.

(vi, 117)

A specially significant theme of Don Juan for our purpose is that the poem is a virulent satire. In the above lines (vi, 117), Byron's satiric nature is revealed. Byron not only highlights Oriental culture, he castigates the vanity of English women of contemporary society as well. Here, in his satiric description, Baba emerges as the mouthpiece of Byron. Byron's statement of royalty and their spiritual inertia is genuine.

When Gulbeyaz expresses her desire for the two slaves – Dudu and Juan, Baba follows her command. He calls his harem brothers for help and sends for the duo. He suggests that they must be placed in a proper order and their hair must be platted properly in order to conceal their identity which might be harbinger of bad luck. Next, he tries to produce the slaves before sultana:

And then he called his brethren to his aid

And sent one on a summons to the pair,

That they must instantly be well arrayed
And above all be combed even to a hair
And brought before the Empress, who had made
Inquiries after them with kindest care,
At which Dudu looked strange, and Juan silly,
But go they must at once, and will I, nill I.

(vi, 118)

Byron is fair and prudent enough to invest Baba with positive qualities, as for example, his generosity towards everyone, particularly Juan and Gulbeyaz.

He is very loyal and sincere. In the harem life, he is the pivotal figure. Baba, as a fatherly figure, manages the whole show in harem. In the harem, his sincerity is witnessed in fulfilling the commands of Gulbeyaz. Baba is not only a eunuch in Oriental palace, rather he plays an instrumental role too. So, the credit goes to Byron for observing Oriental traits of eunuch who is blessed with managerial skills. He presents the captives to the empress, wishing them good luck as a father does to his offspring, and departs for the ceremonious dinner:

And here I leave them at their preparation

For the imperial presence, wherein whether

Gulbeyaz showed them both commiseration

Or got rid of the parties altogether,

I leave them for the present with good wishes,
Though doubts of their well doing, to arrange

Another part of history, for the dishes

Of this our banquet we must sometimes change,

(vi, 119 and 120)

Baba is the pivotal figure in the harem who manages the whole business. He is adroit and experienced. He is not only an eunuch rather manager of the Oriental palace. In terms of imagery, vocabulary and outlook, Baba is thoroughly Oriental. Above all, he is a highly active and compassionate character.

GULBEYAZ

Let us now turn to the other Oriental character, Sultana Gulbeyaz, the empress. In Perso-Turkish and Indo-Muslim world some sultanas have held rein of power. Sultana Gulbeyaz is a Persian character who is passive. She is extremely beautiful. She is likened to goddess, Venus who is supposed to be born of the wave. She is compared to an African animal having hollow, unbranched horns. Here Byron employs a simile in order to enhance the effect of the beauty of sultana. The following lines are reflective of her outward features:

The lady, raising up with such an air

As Venus rose with from the wave, on them

Bent like an antelope a Paphian pair

Of eyes, which put out each surrounding gem,

And raising up an arm, as moonlight fair,
She signed to Baba, who first kissed the hem
Of her deep purple robe, and speaking low,
Pointed to Juan, who remained below.

(v, 96)

In terms of imagery, vocabulary and outlook, Byron’s sultana is authentically Oriental. Moreover, the dress worn by her stands for an emblem of rank or office, or a ceremony. This strand of Byron’s Orientalism, attention to authentic details, makes him markedly distinguishable from his contemporaries, especially Southey and Shelley.

In the imperial hall, the presence of Gulbeyaz is very marked, rather as lofty as her state. Her beauty is of overpowering kind. This viewpoint is supported by the observation of M.K. Joseph: “Gulbeyaz is another Acrasia or Armida.” The seraglio over which she rules as favourite is a place of eunuch guards and nubile but unfulfilled beauties. The following passage too, captures the physical features of Sultana:

Her presence was as lofty as her state;

Her beauty of that overpowering kind,

Whose force description only would abate.

I’d rather leave it much to your own mind

Than lessen it by what I could relate

Of forms and features. I would strike you blind
Could I do justice to the full detail; 
So, luckily for both, my phrase fail.

(v, 97)

Gulbeyaz’s physical beauty cannot be expressed in words. Her beauty is ineffable. In portraying Sultana, Byron attempts to grapple with a whole range of issues and concerns. As an empress, she performs perfectly the accepted social role of a woman. As an idealized beauty she is no more than a treasure, an object to be retained or won. As an idealized beauty, Gulbeyaz is like Guinare, Leila and Zuleika, the heroines of Byron’s ‘Turkish Tales’. She is exalted in rank and very young. She is only twenty-six. Apart from Venus, her physical beauty has been compared to Mary’s, Queen of Scots:

This much however I may add: her years

Were ripe, they might make six and twenty springs,

But there are forms which Time to touch forbears

And turns aside his scythe to vulgar things,

Such as was Mary’s, Queen of Scots.

(v, 98)

As to her nature, she is an introvert. She speaks few words to her attendants who consist of a dozen of girls. They might be called Diana’s chorus ‘cousins’. She has been compared to goddess Diana, a fairy. So is she outwardly:

She spoke some words to her attendants, who
Composed a choir of girls, ten or a dozen,

And were all clad alike; like Juan too,

Who wore their uniform, by Baba chosen.

They formed a very nymph-like looking crew,

Which might have called Diana's chorus 'cousin',

As far as outward show may correspond;

(v, 99)

References to 'goddess Venus' (v, 96), Mary, 'Queen of Scots' (v, 98), 'Diana' (v, 99), are applied in Don Juan to make Gulbeyaz appear as an idealized beauty. She stands out as an abstraction of idealized beauty. Her ethereal beauty reminds one of Byron's Leila in The Giaour, another Oriental female with such beauty which is difficult to concretise. She is fair in complexion and her fingers are fairer. In harem, when Baba proposes to Juan to kiss Gulbeyaz's hand:

And he advanced, though with but a bad grace,

Though on more thoroughbred or fairer fingers

No lips e'er left their transitory trace.

(v, 106)

From the above passage, it is clear that Juan is not attracted towards Sultana. Rather he is pursued by her. Juan because of his preoccupation with Haidee, the Greek flower, does not love Gulbeyaz. So far as Haidee is
concerned, she too, is presented as a very young Sultana but there is in her the mysterious essence of feminine wisdom which is, in one of its aspects, guile and the deepest recesses of its being a force ‘madly blind’. In Don Juan, Byron likens Gulbeyaz to Dudu but negatively which betrays his bias against Muslims.

Gulbeyaz may be considered as the central Oriental character in Byron’s Don Juan. In imperial hall, when Juan advances towards her, as directed by Baba, she looks at him time and again and bids Baba to withdraw. Here the role of her lustful nature cannot be ruled out. On observing all this very minutely or meticulously Baba tells Juan not to feel afraid. Being experienced and far-sighted, Baba witnesses in Sultana’s eyes love for Juan:

The lady eyed him o’er and o’er and bade
Baba retire, which he obeyed in style,

(v, 107)

She is not only fair in complexion, rather physically too. She does possess a sexually attractive body. She is given to sexual profligacy. She has ruddy face which enhances her external beauty. Sexually she is very attractive and active.

When he was gone, there was sudden change.

I know not what might be the lady’s thought,

But o’er her bright brow flashed a tumult strange,

And into her clear cheek the blood was brought,

Blood-red as sunset summer clouds which range
The verge of heaven; and in her large eyes wrought

A mixture of sensations might be scanned,

Of half voluptuousness and half command.

(v, 108)

However, things are by no means as straightforward as they may seem. Gulbeyaz’s love for Juan is central to the plot of the poem and what is amazing is the nature of her love, for her captive, Juan. Here Byron indicates the sexual licentiousness of Orientals. Gulbeyaz is not only voluptuous, rather devilish too. In short, she is akin to the devil. In the words of McGann, “there is scarcely a passage in all of Don Juan where Byron talks about love without also bringing in sexuality frequently by employing puns.” In describing Gulbeyaz’s features, Byron has used Oriental similitude to liken her to the devil in that she suffers from spiritual hollowness. The following extract brings out her features clearly:

Her form had all the softness of her sex,

Her features all the sweetness of the devil

When he put on the cherub to perplex

Eve and paved (God knows how) the road to evil.

The sun himself was scarce more free

Than she from aught at which the eye could cavil;

Yet somehow there was something somewhere wanting,

As if she rather ordered then was granting.
Being Sultana, she is dictatorial. Whatever she desires is fulfilled. What she likes she does. It seems that she has got absolute freedom which is described negatively. For M.K. Joseph "Gulbeyaz, the Sultana, wields a dangerous but reflected power."

Something imperial or imperious threw

A chain o'er all she did; that is, a chain

Was thrown as 'twere about the neck of you.

It may be stressed that in depicting Gulbeyaz Byron seems fascinated by her. Byron portrays her as an arrogant and proud woman. She is self-willed. Even her smile contains an iota of arrogance and self-will:

Her very smile was haughty, though so sweet;

Her very nod was not an inclination.

There was a self-will even in her small feet,

As though they were quite conscious of her station;

They trod as upon necks. And to complete

Her state (it is the custom of her nation),

A poniard decked her girdle, as the sign

She was a sultan's bride (thanks heaven, not mine)
The above extract very clearly indicates the Oriental custom. The possession of a dagger by Sultana is customary among Orientals. In describing reflecting the customs of Orientals he merits appreciation and for his ability to enter the feelings and ethos of a culture which is not his own.

As the bride of Sultan, she plays her role aptly. She believes that whatever is desired by her must be fulfilled. As such, it proves to be her congenital defect. At least her utopian world provides her with some joy:

‘To hear and to obey’ had been from birth
The law of all around her, to fulfil
All phantasies which yielded joy or mirth
Had been her slaves’ chief pleasure, as her will.
Her blood was high, her beauty scarce of earth;
Judge them if her caprices e’er stood still.
Had she but been a Christian, I’ve a notion
We should have found out the perpetual motion.

*Almost all the remarks about the Orient in pre-Renaissance English literature, as for example in William Langland’s Piers Plowman and John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes, are heavily biased by way of invective. The negative view persisted in the Renaissance period, the more so because of the impending*
threat of Turkish aggression. What is, however, significant is that in Elizabethan texts, particularly the drama, the frequency of the appearance of Oriental characters is usually high. Byron had initially formed a negative attitude towards them. Therefore, in *Don Juan*, he considers Christians superior to Muslims, which is evident as from the above passage.

The other common feature of Gulbeyaz is her covetousness. Whatever she desires and sees must be provided to her. Here Byron indicates her manipulating skills or power and position. She spends money lavishly on several items. She buys innumerable things, which is reminiscent of the stereotype about the Orientals:

Whatever she saw and coveted was brought;  
Whate'er she did not see, if she supposed  
It might be seen, with diligence was sought,  
And when t'was found straightway the bargain closed.  
There was no end unto the things she bought,  
Nor to the trouble which her fancies caused.  
Yet even her tyranny had such a grace,  
The women pardoned all except her face.

(v, 113)

Returning to her other features, Byron marvels at the impulsiveness of Gulbeyaz, a typical woman who thinks with her heart which is indicated in the above passage.
Her loyalty to Islam is only superficial. She is given to sexual licentiousness. When Juan is on his way to sale, she orders that he must be purchased, an order which is executed by Baba. Juan has become her latest object of desire. She is utterly charmed by Juan. Her eyes catch Juan, the slave:

Juan, the latest of her whims, had caught
Her eye in passing on his way to sale.
She ordered him directly to be bought,

(v, 114)

Gulbeyaz is courageous. She has given her heart and body to Juan who is very handsome, innocent, generous, moderate and sincere. He is the cynosure, centre of her attraction. She gathers courage and takes every risk for the sake of Juan. She has fallen in love with him but in vain. She is a victim, like Guinare, Leila and Zuleika, the other heroines of Byron's 'Turkish Tales' oppressed by Muslim male members. The lack of matrimonial love in Oriental society is a recurring theme in Byron's 'Turkish Tales'. Leila, Guinare in The Corsair and Gulbeyaz in Don Juan are all victims of it, being represented as playthings, reeling under a hard yoke:

His youth and features favoured the disguise,
And should you ask how she, a sultan's bride,
Could risk or compass such strong phantasies,
This I must leave sultanas to decide
Emperors are only husband in wives' eyes,
And kings and consorts oft are mystified,
As we may ascertain with due precision,
Some by experience, others by tradition.

(v, 115)

In Don Juan, Byron contrasts Christianity with Islam in order to bring out the superiority of the former over the latter. A strong note of intellectual honesty underlies this work, with objective and frank discussions on religious issues. Christians and Muslims alike are first and foremost human beings with all their strengths and follies; they are not simply good or bad for practising a particular religion.

According to M.K. Joseph: "When Juan enters English society, he sees about him the world of marriage in its whole extent the world of designing mothers and "drapery Misses", of Bluestocking and faithless wives, heiresses and fortune – hunters, which is more immoral than that of Halde or Gulbeyaz or Catherine, because it contains the added element of hypocrisy."^7

Gulbeyaz's abundant love for Juan and her superficial loyalty to Islam is very astonishing. She has very attractive eyes which are indicative of her beauty:

She now conceived all difficulties past
And deemed herself extremely condescending
When, being made her property at last,
Without more preface, in her blue eyes blending
Passion and power, a glance on him she cast,
And merely saying, `Christian, Canst thou love?
Conceived that phrase was quite enough to move.

(v, 116)

Her announcement of love startled Juan. For Juan is preoccupied with Haidee’s thoughts. His mind kept on receding, and overflowing with Haidee’s soft Ionian face. The warm blood of Haidee, the Greek beauty, kept on glowing in his face. She was rushing back upon his heart and left him in agony. The words used by Gulbeyaz are as poignant as sabre:

And left his cheeks as pale as snowdrops blowing
These words went through his soul like Arab spears,
So that he spoke not, burst into tears.

(v, 117)

In the above lines, Byron employs an Oriental simile in likening the pungency of Gulbeyaz’s word to Arab spears.

As to vanity of ladies, when Gulbeyaz sees the condition of Juan, she is filled with a violent commotion. Surprisingly, she is not disturbed at the tears shed by Juan. “Women shed tears and use them” as weapons according to circumstances. Here Byron satirizes women in his portrayal of Sultana which contributes to making Don Juan a satire:
She was a good deal shocked; not shocked at tears,
For women shed and use them at their liking.

(v, 118)

She is not a balm-like woman; she does not comfort Juan. Another feature of her is identified thus by M.K. Joseph thus: "in the false paradise of the seraglio, the woman imperious Gulbeyaz, is the serpent." The tears in the eyes of Juan are unprecedented which surprisingly, have not generated any sympathy in Sultana:

And she would have consoled, but knew not how;
Having no equals, nothing which had e'er
Infected her with sympathy till now,
And never having dreamt what 'twas to bear
Aught of a serious sorrowing kind, although.
There might arise some pouting petty care
To cross her brow, she wondered how to sneer
Her eyes another's eye could shed a tear.

(v, 119)

The satiric note of Byron in the above passage cannot be missed. Through Juan's tears, it is suggested, if men's eyes appear wet, there must be pain or something serious. But ladies shed it at any time and for nothing. Here Byron's attack on the vanity of women is significant. Eventually, she is swayed
by Juan's pathetic condition:

            And thus Gulbeyaz, though she knew not why,

            Felt an odd glistening moisture in her eye.

            (v, 120)

As to the image of Muslim women in Byron's 'Turkish Tales' their picture is presented negatively. Most of the Oriental heroines readily convert to Christianity. But in the case of Gulbeyaz, it is not correct. Gulbeyaz, for the first time in her life, is insulted. To better Juan's condition, she stakes her life but not for a noble cause. In the beginning, she was domineering, and to some extent, sympathetic too. But her failure in love leads to her frustration and hostility:

            Gulbeyaz, for the first time in her days,

            Was much embarrassed, never having met

            In all her life with aught save prayer and praise;

            And as she also risked her life to get

            Him whom she meant to tutor in love's ways

            Into a comfortable tete a tete,

            (v, 122)

But the problem of Gulbeyaz remains with her because Juan has got Haidee into his head. He is unable to forget her which makes him appear as rude or unmannerly. But as far as Gulbeyaz is concerned, she considers herself as creditor of Juan because she has got him to her palace. "The
accommodation of Gulbeyaz to the wishes of her lord and master is recounted with a fine detached irony, for Byron is not much involved with them as characters except as they furnish an opportunity for comment on the ways of monarchs and women", points out Leslie A. Marchand. And staring at him she becomes rosy:

Juan's was good and might have been still better,
But he had got Haidee into his head.
However strange, he could not yet forget her,
Which made him seem exceedingly ill-bred
Gulbeyaz, who looked on him to her palace led,
Began to blush up to the eyes and then
Grow deadly pale and then blush back again.

(v, 124)

The unabated love for Juan, reveals the inner character of Sultana. She loves outward glitter and is hollow from within. The words 'looking on him' and 'blushing' (V, 124), express the sensual appetite of Gulbeyaz. In Don Juan, Byron celebrates love as the supreme manifestation of mankind's paradoxical nature.

One of the striking features of Gulbeyaz is her pride. Not only proud, she is deceitful too. The narrator of the poem Don Juan seems omnipresent who controls and manipulates the action and emotions of Oriental characters. It stands to Byron's credit that he allows a genuine Oriental relate the future of
other Orientals as Baba does for Gulbeyaz. Eventually, in a dictatorial way, she looks into Juan’s eyes for love, an act not expected of an empress:

At length, in an imperial way, she laid
Her hand on his and bending on him eyes,
Which needed not an empire to persuade,
Looked into his for love, where none replies.
Her brow grew black, but she would not upbraid,
That being the last thing a proud woman tries.
She rose and pausing one chaste moment, threw
Herself upon his breast, and there she grew.

(v, 125)

Like Leila, Byron’s Gulbeyaz too, exhibits some remnant of the stereotype— an Oriental female subjected to tyranny, total segregation and subjugation and deprived of personal and sexual freedom. Her attempt to break bondage results only in frustration and vindictiveness. She does not enjoy even basic freedom and is treated more as an object, rather than as a person.

As pointed out earlier, Gulbeyaz is a sensual woman. Her sexual desire seems insatiable. The following description of the Sultana brings out her sensuality:

This was an awkward test, as Juan found,

But he was steeled by sorrow, wrath, and pride.
With gentle force her white arms he unwound
And seated her all drooping by his side.
Then rising haughtily he glanced around
And looking coldly in her face, he cried,
'The prisoned eagle will not pair, nor I
Serve a sultana's sensual phantasy.

(v, 126)

Her condition is chaotic. She passes through an ordeal. Juan is yet haunted by romantic notions of Haidee. By Juan's refusal of love to Gulbeyaz, Byron is suggesting the universally true idea of freedom. No matter, how powerful and great people are, but a true heart cannot be purchased. It is priceless which is evident from Juan's refusal to Gulbeyaz:

'Thou ask't if I can love; be this the proof
How much I have loved — that I love not thee!
In this vile garb, the distaff, web, and woof
Were fitter for me. Love is for the free!
I am not dazzled by this splendid roof.
Whate'er thy power, and great it seems to be,
Heads how, knees bend, eyes watch around a throne,
And hands obey — our hearts are still own.'
Having identified her sensuality and frustration, let us examine her commanding nature. In the Oriental palace, being Sultana, she has never encountered ‘No’ by any one. Her dictate is always obeyed. She never cares for the wishes and desires of her subjects. Here Byron mocks at the empty-heartedness of the royalty of both the faiths – Islam and Christianity. She does not care for fair or foul means. Her objective is the fulfilment of her sexual thirst:

This was a truth to us extremely trite;

Not so to her, who ne’er had heard such things

She deemed her least command must yield delight,

Earth being only made for queens and kings.

If hearts lay on the left side or the right

She hardly knew; to such perfection brings

Legitimacy its born votaries when

Aware of their due royal rights o’er men.

She is a very charming lady. However, she seems as a narcissist, which is evident from the stress she lays on her charms. She has got a double ‘divine right’:

Besides, as has been said, she was so fair

As even in a much humbler lot had made
A kingdom or confusion anywhere,

And also, as may be presumed, she laid

Some stress on charms, which seldom are, if e'er,

By their possessors thrown into the shade.

She thought hers gave a double 'right divine,

And half of that opinion's also mine:

(v, 129)

Suffering leads to redemption but Gulbeyaz, when spurned by Juan, becomes indignant. She has become detrimental. Her anger has been compared to a beast of prey. Two images – 'tigress' and 'lioness' are used to bring out her nature. She is very tempestuous. Here Byron seems to suggest that when a pretty girl is refused in love, she becomes deadly and frustrated, as is the case with Sultana Gulbeyaz. She is totally dejected and torn into pieces:

A tigress robbed of young, a lioness

Or any interesting beast of prey,

Are similes at hand for the distress

Of ladies who cannot have their own way;

(v, 132)

Besides, Gulbeyaz's hopes are shattered. She is badly upset. She is in an unenviable predicament. She can be branded as a woman of fiery temperament. She is easily affected by intense sexual love:
If I said fire flashed from Gulbeyaz's eyes,
'T were nothing, for her eyes flashed always fire;
Or said her cheeks assumed the deepest dyes,
I should but bring disgrace upon the dyer,
_so supernatural was her passion's rise,
For ne'er till now she knew a checked desire_

(v, 134)

So far her rage is concerned, it was momentary. Her momentary rage is not less intense. Her fury helps her look more beautiful:

Her rage was but a minute's, and 't was well -
A moment's more had slain her; but the while
It lasted 'twas like a short glimpse of hell.
Nought's more sublime than energetic bile,
Though horrible to see, yet grand to tell,
Like ocean warring 'gainst a rocky isle;
And the deep passions flashing through her form
Made her a beautiful embodied storm.

(v, 135)

There is a storm in Gulbeyaz's mind. The simile 'Ocean warring' is employed to indicate the rage of the Sultan's bride, which has no impact on
Juan. Her rage is like a tempest, a violent tropical hurricane to match her fury. She always tries to outwit Juan's love but fails. She eagerly wants to kill Juan as Lear does in Shakespeare's King Lear (1605) to kill Goneril and Reagan but with a difference. Here the killing of Juan means to win his heart:

A vulgar tempest 't were to a typhoon
To match a common fury with her rage,
And yet she did not want to reach the moon,
Like moderate Hotspur on the immortal page.
Her anger pitched into a lower tune,
Perhaps the fault of her soft sex and age.
Her wish was but to 'kill, kill, kill,' like Lear's,
And then her thirst of blood was quenched in tears.

(v, 136)

The anger of Gulbeyaz has been compared to Lear's to make it more profound. Notwithstanding her rage she is very tenacious in attaining her goal. Her silence is indicative of her fury. Probably, she has some premonition of a disaster. Being spurned and embarrassed, she does not lose her firmness and determination. Sometimes insult is good, as in the case of Gulbeyaz:

A storm it raged, and like the storm it passed,

Passed without words; in fact she could not speak.

And then her sex's shame broke in at last,
A sentiment till then in her but weak,
But now it flowed in natural and fast,
As water through an unexpected leak,
For she felt humbled, and humiliation
Is sometimes good for people in her station.

(V. 137)

Gulbeyaz is not a lady of repenting nature. After being insulted, she makes a very ominous plan. She thinks to cut off Juan's head. She tries to bring him into repentance. She is not repentant of her folly:

Her first thought was to cut off Juan's head;
Her second, to cut only his — acquaintance;
Her third, to ask him where he had been bred;
Her fourth, to rally him into repentance;
Her fifth, to call her maids and go to bed;
Her sixth, to stab herself; her seventh, to sentence The lash to Baba; but her grand resource Was to sit down again; and cry of course.

(v, 139)

She thinks to pierce herself with a pointed tool or weapon. She also thinks of beheading Juan but she takes pity on him and spares his life. Her
failure in love has aroused pity in her:

She thought to stab herself, but then she had

The dagger close at hand, which made it awkward,

For eastern stays are little made to pad,

So that a poniard pierces if 'tis stuck hard

She thought of killing Juan, but, poor lad,

Though he deserved it well for being backward,

The cutting off his head was not the art

Most likely to attain her aim – his heart

(v. 140)

In the Oriental court what amuses and intrigues us is the incongruity between the personal inclination of the characters and the public attitudes they are required to play. The following description of the Sultana Gulp beyaz is given by Baba serves an instance in point:

‘Bride of the Sun and Sister of the Moon’

(‘T was thus he spake) ‘And Empress of the Earth!

Whose frown would put the spheres all out of tune,

Whose smile makes all the planets dance with mirth,

Your slave brings tidings – he hopes not to soon-

Which your sublime attention may be worth.
The Sun himself has sent me like a ray
To hint that he is coming up this way!

Gulbeyaz has been compared to the ‘Bride of the Sun’, ‘Sister of the Moon’ and ‘Empress of the earth’. All these images express Gulbeyaz’s glory, beauty and power respectively. She is very hasty and rash, obstinately determined and straightforward. Besides, she is bold and beautiful. She stakes her life in order to win Juan’s heart. She wants to spend a life of unfettered freedom:

And yet a headlong, headstrong, downright she,
Young, beautiful, and daring, who would risk
A throne, the world, the universe to be
Beloved in her own way, and rather whisk
The stars from out the sky than not be free
As are the billows when the breeze is brisk -
Though such a she’s a devil (if that there be one),
Yet she would make full many a Manichean.

Notwithstanding being weak-minded, she has become desperate. She reacts negatively, to some extent, to her husband. Here Byron highlights the loveless marriage of Gulbeyaz which indicates also the practice of polygamy in
I know Gulbeyaz was extremely wrong;

I own it, I deplore it, I condemn it,

But I detest all fiction even in song

And so must tell the truth, howe'er, you blame it

Her reason being weak, her passions strong,

She thought that her lord's heart (even could she claim it)

Was scare enough; for he had fifty-nine

Years and a fifteen-hundredth concubine.

(vi, 8)

Though Gulbeyaz is the consort of an emperor, she is wicked and unreliable. She loves a Christian, an act which evokes abhorrence in Muslim society. It will be a stigma on Muslim society. Her desire for a Christian is unethical on her part:

Gulbeyaz was an empress, but had been

Perhaps as wretched if a peasant's quean.

(vi, 25)

In the Seraglio, Gulbeyaz is known as 'the Mother of Maids' (VI, 30), which is her title. Nothing can be done without her permission. It is not clear whether she has become mother or not, or the maids who call her mother are senior to her or junior is not important. She has got this title in the seraglio by
virtue of marrying the Sultan. Her special duty in the seraglio is to remain reticent and reserved and look after activities of concubines:

Whether she was a mother, I know not,

Or whether they were maids, who called her mother,

But this is her seraglio title, got

I know not how, but good as any other;

So Cantemir can tell you, or De Tott,

Her office was to keep aloof or smother

All bad propensities in fifteen hundred

Young women and correct them when they blundered.

(vi, 31)

When 'Mamma' (VI, 47), that is Gulbeyaz, realises that Sultan has recognized Juan, she places him with Dudu – a quiet, inoffensive, silent and shy girl. The very next day, she is perturbed. Her condition is agonizing. Her impetuous desire makes her awful. The images of nightingale and her singing are employed in order to compare the beauty and melodious voice of the Sultana and her pain, anguish and predicament:

With the first day ray or rather grey of morn,

Gulbeyaz rose from restlessness, and pale

As passion rises with its bosom worn,

Arrayed herself with mantle, gem, and veil.
The nightingale that sings with the deep thorn,
Which fable places in her breast of wail,
Is lighter far of heart and voice than those
Whose headlong passions from their proper woes

(vi, 87)

After describing her features, it is worth noting to compare and contrast her with Gulnare, the heroine of The Corsair, one of the 'Turkish Tales' by Byron. The most striking feature of Gulnare is the physical and moral revolt on her part. Gulnare becomes the very symbol of freedom in comparison to Gulbeyaz, the heroine of Don Juan.

As far as Gulbeyaz's bed is concerned, it is very luxurious. Even the comfortable bed does not provide solace to her heart. She is highly impulsive. She suffers from the trauma of love and arrogance. She is very sad and distressed over her mistake:

Rose the Sultana from a bed of splendour,
Softer than the soft Sybarite's who cried
Aloud because his feelings were too tender
To brook a ruffled rose leaf by his side;
So beautiful that art could little mend her,
Thought pale with conflicts between love and pride.
So agitated was she with her error
She did not even look into the mirror.

(vi, 89)

She seems very authoritative. When Sultan is out of harem, Gulbeyaz, ‘the Mother of pearl’ (vi, 98), acts freely. She is very eager to know about the disguise of Juan. Moreover, she wishes to know how he spent his night in the harem. She summons Baba and enquires:

Don Juan at his hands and information
Of what had past since all the slaves retired,
And whether he had occupied their station,
If matters had been managed as desired,
And his disguise with due consideration
Kept up and above all, the where and how
He had passed the night was what she wished to know.

(vi, 99)

That she is not a specimen of perseverance. She is very fast and fastidious. She is given to haste which makes her look irrational and impatient. She easily gets excited and annoyed which betrays her short-tempered and fragile nature:

Gulbeyaz was no model of true patience
Nor much disposed to wait in or deed.
She liked quick answers in all conversations
And when she saw him stumping like a steed
In his replies, she puzzled him for fresh ones.
And as his speech grew still more broken—kneed,
Her cheek began to flush, her eyes to sparkle,
And her proud brow's blue veins to swell and darkle.

(vi, 101)

Her impatience indicates that her loyalty to Islam is not sincere, rather it is a sham. When she comes to the harsh reality that Juan had shared bed with Dudu, she is engulfed by grief which is evident from her face. She becomes despondent and melancholic. Her ominous dream is shattered:

So deep an anguish wrong Gulbeyaz’s brow
Her cheek turned ashes, ears rung, brain whirled round
As if she had received a sudden blow,
And the heart’s dew of pain sprang fast and chilly
O’er her fair front, like morning’s on a lily.

(vi, 105)

Gulbeyaz is bold-hearted. Nonetheless her predicament is that she does not lose her heart, as Baba mistakenly thought. She is incensed and vindictive. She has become as deadly as a large snake that crushes and kills its prey by twisting round it. Her heart is in pain and passions seem decreasing. Inwardly, however, she is utterly disturbed. The following lines graphically describe her
condition:

She stood a moment as a pythoness

                    Stands on her tripod, agonized and full

Of inspiration gathered from distress,

When all the heartstrings like wild horses pull

The heart asunder. Then as more or less

Their speed abated or their strength grew dull,

She sunk down on her seat by slow degrees

                    And bowed her throbbing head o’ver trembling knees.

(vi, 107)

In depicting the loathsome aspects of Gulbeyaz Byron is not directing ire against Orientals in particular, rather he is condemning corrupt authority.

Internally her character may not be attractive but externally she is blessed with beauty. Her beauty shines bright. For long colourful things of her life once glowed fresh seem fading. They are gone beyond recovery. She seems in an oblivious mood. Her life seems devoid of all pleasure:

Her face declined and was unseen; her hair

Fell in long tresses like the weeping willow,

Sweeping the marble underneath her chair,

Or rather sofa (for it was all pillow,
A low, soft ottoman). And black despair

Stirred up and down her bosom like a billow,

Which rushing to some shore, whose shingles check

Its farther course, but must receive its wreck.

(vi, 108)

The problem of Gulbeyaz is self-generated. She is solely responsible for that. She has long hair which is expected of every Muslim girl. Sometimes the long hair of ladies play very important role in hiding their identity as is the case with Gulbeyaz. Her hand is as beautiful as a marble:

Her head hung down, and her long hair in stooping

Concealed her features better than a veil;

And one hand o’er the ottomen lay drooping,

White, waxen, and alabaster pale.

Would that I were a painter to be grouping

All that a poet drags into detail!

(vi, 109)

In the above passage, Byron employs some similitudes to bring out physical beauty of Sultana. She is as white as an alabaster; as soft as wax; her long hair is better than a veil, a cloth used to hide the face or identity of a person. The word ‘veil’ indicates Oriental culture and lifestyle. “He [Byron] is as nonchalant as Hollywood in having Juan speak, to the Englishman Johsnon, and
to the Turkish Baba and Gulbeyaz. She is in utter desperation. She wants to take the world by storm. Perhaps, she has no spiritual bulwark. Her condition is chaotic:

At length she rose up and began to walk
Slowly along the room, but silent still,
And her brow cleared, but not trouble eye.
The wind was down, but still the sea ran high.

Being Sultana, she cannot express her problem—grief, agony, misery and predicament in words. Her love is unshakeable but through body language everything is exposed secret which can be sensed veritably. Her revenge motive and urge to restore her honour are reflective of her commanding nature. She stops walking and summons Baba and tells him to bring two slaves. But Baba does not want to do so because he is an experienced man and thinks of the repercussions which would be detrimental to Sultana and to the harem occupants. He shivers violently with fear and seeks Gulbeyaz’s permission to leave the harem; she does not allow him to go and adds that Juan must be secretly brought to her. Baba realises all the dangers, which seem inevitable. For, he invokes by the sacred hair of Prophet Muhammad’s beard for her order to be withdrawn. In terms of vocabulary, Baba is thoroughly Oriental and represents Muslim faith in his invocation of the Prophet Muhammad’s beard:

Gulbeyaz stopped and beckoned Baba. “Slave,
Bring the two slaves,' she said in a low tone,
But one which Baba did not like to brave,
And yet he shuddered and seemed rather prone
To prove reluctant and begged leave to crave
(Though he well knew the meaning) to be shown
What slaves Her Highness wished to indicate,
For fear of any error, like the late.

***

'The Georgian and her paramour,' replied
The imperial bride and added, 'Let the boat
Be ready by the secret portal's side
You know the rest.' The words stuck in her throat
Despite her injured love and fiery pride.
And of this Baba willingly took note
And begged by every hair of Mahomet's beard
She would revoke the order he had heard.

***

(vi, 112 and 113)

In sum, Gulbeyaz is not what she seems. Physically she is very intriguing
but spiritually hollow. She is full of sexual hypocrisy. Her loyalty to Islam is
superficial. She is a typical Oriental female, for she is a victim of loveless marriage. She is imperious before she asks Juan for her love and vindictive after her failure to arouse love in Juan for her.

**SULTAN**

The other Oriental character is Sultan, the husband of Gulbeyaz. Sultan is a word which is originally an abstract noun signifying "power, authority", but which by tenth century assumed the meaning of the holder of power, authority. Thus, speaking historically, it could then be used for provincial and even petty rulers who assumed de facto power along side the Caliph, but in the eleventh century it was specially used by the dominant powers in the central lands of the former caliphate, the Great Saljuk who initially overshadowed the Abbasids of Baghdad. In the Perso-Turkish and Indo-Muslim worlds it denotes a man who is the holder of power.

Sultan is an Oriental character who is very humble and refined. He has four wives which reflects the practice of polygamy which is allowed in Islam in order to stop sexual anarchy under certain circumstances and provide shelter to hapless women. Sultana Gulbeyaz is his fourth and favourite wife. Whenever, he visits her, he makes it known publicly which is reflective of Muslim culture:

His Majesty was always so polite

As to announce his visits a long while

Before he came, especially at night;

For being the last wife of the emperor,
She was of course the favourite of the four.

"The sumptuous polygamy of Stamboul, the sumptuous polyandry of St. Petersburg, are both in the end equally sterile, boring and sad; and Byron equates them by his flippant suggestion for solving the Russo-Turkish problems." Sultan is a man of sombre nature. He has a beard and wears a shawl which are indicative of his Oriental lifestyle. He is a good ruler. He is as great as Solyman, the founder of the kingdom of Turkey:

His Highness was a man of solemn port,
Shawled to the nose and bearded to the eyes,
Snatched from a prison to preside at court
His lately bowstring brother caused his rise
He was as good a sovereign of the sort
As any mentioned in the histories
Of Cantemir or Knolles, where few shine
Save Solyman, the glory of the line.

In a true Oriental vein, Byron presents his Sultan. In terms of custom, dress and vocabulary, Byron's accuracy is highly remarkable. Especially the words 'shawl', 'beard', and 'Solyman' signify Oriental customs and culture.

Sultan is a religious man. He goes to mosque and offers his prayers
which is expected of a Muslim. He is an extremely honest man; he believes in
the honesty of his vizier, a high executive officer of Muslim countries and
especially of the former Turkish empire. Probably he does not have domestic
cares which is a clue to his carefree nature. That is why he has been branded
as the absurd Sultan, by M.K. Joseph. Byron’s remarks towards Muslims on this
count are not up to the mark. He indicates Christians’ superiority over Muslims:

He went to mosque in state and said his prayers

With more than ‘Oriental scrupulosity’.

He left to his vizier all state affairs

And showed but little royal curiosity.

I know not if he had domestic cares;

No process proved connubial animosity,

Four wives and twice five hundred maids, unseen,

Were ruled as calmly as a Christian queen.

(v, 148)

Since Sultan is religious, the words ‘mosque’ and ‘prayer’ demonstrate his
religious association where Byron brilliantly succeeds in recreating Oriental
ethos. He has fifty daughters and four dozen sons. The daughters live in the
harem like nuns till they are married to some ruler:

He had fifty daughters and four dozen sons,

Of whom all such as came of age were stowed,
The former in a palace, where like nuns
They live till some bashaw was sent abroad,
When she, whose fun it was, was wed at once,
Sometimes at six years old. Though this seemed odd,
'Tis, true; the reason is that the bashaw
Must make a present to his sire-in-law.

(v, 152)

In sum, in portraying Sultan's daughters Byron remains scrupulously faithful to local colour yet this Oriental setting helps to disrupt commonplaces and move one to examine broader social and political issues.

Let us turn to Sultan's sons who are kept in prison till they are grown up. Their upbringing and education are magnificent but with a difference. They do not deserve to be the rulers of a state. Their education is improper. The lack of proper education is because of the carelessness of Sultan:

His sons were kept in prisons, till they grew
Of years to fill a bowstring or the throne,
One or the other, but which of the two
Could yet be known unto the fates alone.
Meantime the education they went through
Was princely, as the proofs have always shown,
So that the heir apparent still was found

No less deserving to be hanged than crowned.

(v, 153)

Through Sultan's features, Byron indicates the monarchical hierarchy of Muslim countries and especially of Turkey. It was the luxurious lifestyle of Orientals which brought about their downfall.

Beyond physical features come insights into characters, and they too point out an archetypal figure. Sultan has much regard for his fourth wife Gulbeyaz. With all his magnificence he salutes Sultana Gulbeyaz. He clears her dazzling eyes which is liked by Gulbeyaz. His love and regard for his wife are mandatory to maintain a healthy connubial relation. He is welcomed by Sultana gracefully, but her loyalty is artificial which betrays the loveless marriage of the Orientals in particular:

His Majesty saluted his fourth spouse
With all the ceremonies of his rank,
Who cleared her sparkling eyes and smoothed her brows,
As suits a matron who has played a prank.
These must seem doubly mindful of their vows,
To save the credit of their breaking bank.
So no men are such cordial greetings given
As those whose wives have made them fit for heaven.

(v, 154)
Again, however, things are by no means as straightforward as they may seem. By portraying Sultan and Sultana's unhappy relationship, probably, Byron hints at the relationship of his own parents which was not cordial.

Moreover, Sultan is a wise man. In the harem, he looks at the things around and finds Juan in his garb. The discovery of Juan is not amazing for him. But being wise he soon realizes that something is wrong. He startles all, especially Sultana in harem when Juan's identity is established. Moreover, Juan is a Christian – very cute, handsome, innocent and passive, unlike the damsels in Oriental palace:

His Highness cast around his great black eyes
And looking, as he always looked, perceived
Juan amongst the damsels in disguise,
At which he seemed no whit surprised nor grieved,
But just remarked with air sedate and wise,
While still a fluttering sigh Gulbeyaz heaved,
'I see you've bought another girl, 'tis pity
That a mere Christian should be half so pretty.'

(v, 155)

The Sultan is noble and exalted. He does everything according to routine. In the harem, he looks at Gulbeyaz and expects welcome by Sultana which seems natural but his 'ulterior view' comes out later:
His Highness, the sublimest of mankind—
So styled according to the usual forms
Of very monarch, till they are consigned
To those sad hungry Jacobins the worms,
Who on the very loftiest kings have dined -
His Highness gazed upon Gulbeyaz' charms,
Expecting all the welcome of a lover
(A 'Highness welcome' all the wide world over)

(vi, 13)

Sultan can be compared to the another Oriental character of Byron, Giaffir of the Bride of Abydos, "a self-centred despot, Giaffir who has scant regard for others' feelings." ^12 Sultan has thirty kingdoms. In harem, the discovery of Juan by Sultan is detested by Sultana:

Master of thirty kingdoms so sublime
And of a wife by whom he was abhorred,
A thing of much less import in that clime -

(vi, 90)

He does not think much of the matter as Sultana does. In actuality, he does not feel bothered because he reposes his faith in the vizier and leaves all state affairs to him. The faith which Sultan has in vizier reflects the genuine feature of the Orientals. Apart from Gulbeyaz, he simply likes to have a
mistress. Love is as a duty on his part which makes him love his fourth wife. N
eedless to point out, the lack of matrimonial love in Oriental society is indeed a recurring theme in Byron's "Turkish Tales". Gulbeyaz in Don Juan is a victim of it:

He did not think much on the matter nor

Indeed on any other. As a man

He liked to have a handsome paramour

At hand, as one may like to have a fan,

And therefore of Circassians had good store

As an amusement after the Divan,

Though an unusual fit of love or duty

Had made him lately bask in his bride's beauty.

(vi, 91)

The idea of Sultan of having a mistress indicates the sexual licentiousness of Oriental rulers and their luxurious lifestyle which was very common during Byron's day. Byron condemns the lewd behaviour of the Oriental rulers. Above all, Sultan is a stereotype and passive character unlike Giaffir. When he gets up, he performs ablutions – the washing of certain parts of the body, according to Oriental custom; he offers prayers and other pious rituals in a true Oriental vein:

And no he rose, and after due ablutions
Exact ed by the custom of the East

And prayers and other pious evolutions,

He drank six cups of coffee at the least

And then withdraw to hear about the Russians,

Whose victories had recently increased

In Catherine's reign, whom glory still adores

As greatest of all sovereign and whores.

(vi, 92)

The Oriental traits of Sultan's character are, unmistakable and genuine. The taking of "six cups of coffee" reflects the Oriental lifestyle and passivity of Sultan. At the level of political allegory Sultan's similarity with Lady Catherine is significant. Here Byron highlights the disloyalty and immorality of the higher officials of his day, not only in Oriental but also in European society.

Sultan is not loyal to Gubeyaz. He has been compared to Lady Catherine who is disloyal to her husband. They both are immoral and licentious. Sultan being a Muslim is not supposed to be treacherous towards his spouse:

Had Catherine and the Sultan understood

Their own true interests, which kings rarely know,

Until 'tis taught by lessons rather rude,

There was a way to end their strife, although

Perhaps precarious, had they but thought good
Without the aid of prince or plenipo:

She to dismiss her guards and his harem

And for their other matters meet and share 'em.

(vi, 95)

In the above extract, Byron equates them by his sage advice for solving the Russo-Turkish problem. Leslie A. Marchand says: "Byron made it perfectly clear that he was concerned not principally with the barbarities of the heathen Turks and the uncivilized Russians but with the senseless slaughter and suffering brought about by the English alliances in the Napoleonic wars by English support of legitimacy and the unholy — "Holy Alliance."^^

As an appendage to the political allegory, Byron highlights the spiritual emptiness and mannerism of the ruling class. They do not care for the feelings and emotions of their subjects, until they are taught some lesson. They think of their own interests and benefits only. They indulge in sexual perversion.

To sum up, Byron's Oriental characters are an amalgam of vice and virtue; and loyal to their faith. Above all, they are, true to life.
REFERENCES


(2) Ibid., p. 264.


(7) Ibid., p. 246.

(8) Ibid., p. 244.

(9) Leslie A. Marchand, op. cit., p. 195

(10) Ibid., p. 195.


(13) Leslie A. Marchand, op. cit., p. 204.