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The Historical And Social Background Of Sujata: Was She A Yadava Woman?

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Abstract

Sujata is a significant figure in Buddhist tradition, primarily remembered for offering milk-rice (kheer) to Siddhartha Gautama before his enlightenment. This act of generosity played a crucial role in reviving the Bodhisattva's strength after years of extreme asceticism, ultimately leading him towards the Middle Path and eventual enlightenment. Despite Sujata's prominence in Buddhist lore, there is limited historical clarity regarding her social and caste background. Scholars and historians have debated her origins, with some suggesting she belonged to the Yadava community. This paper explores textual references, historical interpretations, and socio-cultural contexts to examine this claim.

Pāli Canon and other early Buddhist texts provide limited information about Sujata's lineage but describe her as the daughter of a wealthy householder in the village of Senani, near Uruvela (modern-day Bodh Gaya). The *Dīghanikāya* and *Jātakas* mention her in passing, focusing more on her act of offering rather than her ancestry. The term 'Senani' is sometimes interpreted as a title for a village headman or military leader. Some interpretations of these texts argue that since she was a cowherd's daughter, she may have belonged to a pastoral community, which has led to speculations linking her to the Yadava or Gopa (cowherd) lineage.

Yadavas, historically associated with cow-rearing and pastoral traditions, have long been identified with Lord Krishna's lineage in Hindu texts. The *Mahabharata* and *Puranas* describe them as a warrior and agricultural community, which aligns with descriptions of Sujata's family as wealthy landowners and cattle rearers. Some scholars argue that the association between Sujata and the Yadava community may stem from the broader historical reality that many pastoral and agricultural groups in ancient India had overlapping identities. The fact that her father was referred to as a 'Senani' could indicate an administrative or warrior class background rather than a purely pastoral one.

The caste structure in ancient India was fluid, and communities were often categorized based on occupation rather than rigid birth-based hierarchy. If Sujata's family were indeed cowherds, it is very much plausible that they were associated with the Yadava tradition.

Keywords: Senani, Yadav, Agricultural, Pastoral, cowherd, Lineage. Hierarchy, Pali-canon

Introduction

Sujata's role in Buddhist tradition is pivotal, as she is credited with providing nourishment to the Buddha at a critical moment in his spiritual journey. This act of kindness is often seen as symbolizing the Middle Path, the balance between self-indulgence and extreme asceticism.

In the Buddhist tradition, Sujata holds a paramount position as the foremost and earliest female devotee of the Buddha. She was born in **Senani village**, located in the **Urubela region**, which lies on the eastern banks of the **Niranjana River**, directly opposite **Bodh Gaya**. The Niranjana River is also known as **Naga Nadi**, indicating that the entire Magadha region was predominantly inhabited by **Naga and Ahi tribes**. The **Magadhi language** spoken in this area was also referred to as **Ahiri language**. The sandy eastern banks of the Niranjana River were known as **Urubela**, with "Uru" meaning sand and "Bela" meaning shore. It was in this sandy region that the large village of **Senani** was situated.

The village of Senani was established by a powerful and capable individual named **Nandaval (Nandik)**, who was also a **leader of the army**. Because of his military role, he was honored with the title **Senani (meaning army chief or general)**. Over time, the village came to be known as **Senani village**, after him. **Nandaval Senani** had an exceptionally intelligent and beautiful daughter named **Nandavala (Nandika) or Sujata**. The name **Nandavala/Nandika** was derived from her father's name, while she was also known as **Sujata** due to her virtuous nature.

Sujata was renowned for her extraordinary beauty and grace. She was married to a **wealthy Yadava (Yaduvanshi) merchant** in **Varanasi**, belonging to her own clan. Sujata had a devoted maidservant named **Purna**, who was also known as **Uttara**. Sujata's **only son, Yash**, later became a Buddhist monk and attained **Arhatship (spiritual enlightenment)**.

Sujata was a **courageous woman from a noble lineage**, and she played a pivotal role in the growth and expansion of **Buddhism**. She was among the **first female supporters of Buddhism**, and her son **Yash** was instrumental in strengthening the Buddhist monastic community (**Sangha**). Among the first **60 monks ordained by the Buddha, 55 were under the leadership of Bhikkhu Yash**.

Sujata was born in **Gaya** and was married in **Varanasi**. The **family from Varanasi**, to which she was married, was among the first to accept Buddhism along with their entire household. The Buddha himself acknowledged her contribution, stating:

"Among my foremost female devotees, Senani's daughter, Sujata, is the greatest."

Even in later periods, during the **revival of Buddhism**, certain **cunning and deceitful scholars** attempted to distort Sujata's significance and diminish the importance of her lineage and caste identity. Their intention was to ensure that Sujata's legacy did not spread beyond her place of birth. This has led some to question whether Sujata belonged to an **"untouchable" caste**. However, an impartial examination of historical texts and logical reasoning clearly refutes such claims. Sujata remains a **highly revered figure in Buddhist history**, symbolizing **compassion, generosity, and devotion** to the Buddhist path.

1. Sujata in Buddhist Texts

Sujata is a significant figure in Buddhist tradition, primarily remembered for offering milk-rice (kheer) to Siddhartha Gautama before his enlightenment. While Buddhist texts do not explicitly identify her caste, multiple historical, textual, and socio-cultural references suggest a strong connection between Sujata and the Yadava (Gopa) community.

1.1. Textual Evidence from Buddhist Scriptures

The Pali Canon, particularly the Vinaya Pitaka and Majjhima Nikaya, describes Sujata as a daughter of a householder from Senani village. The Jataka tales reinforce her role as a village woman who, believing Siddhartha to be a tree deity, offered him rice cooked in milk. A passage from the Pali Canon states:

"Then Sujata, a daughter of a householder in the village of Senani, approached the sage and, seeing him seated under the tree, offered the golden bowl filled with milk-rice, saying, 'May this be an offering for the fulfillment of all your wishes.'"

1.2. Linguistic and Historical Evidence of Yadava (Gopa) Identity

1.2.1. The term "Senani" and its association with Gopa lineage

The name "Senani" is significant because, in ancient India, it often denoted a leader or commander, a historically linked to Yadava (Gopa) communities. The Mahabharata and other texts refer to Gopas as protectors and warriors, aligning with the etymology of Senani.

King Bimbisara, a contemporary of the Buddha, was referred to as *Seniyabimbisara*, with "Seniya" often linked to Gopa identity in texts like *Rajatarangini* and *Medini-Kosha*.

1.2.2. Gopas as a prominent pastoral community

The Yadava or Gopa community was historically engaged in cattle-rearing and milk production, aligning with Sujata's act of offering milk-rice. The production of dairy products, including kheer, was a defining cultural and occupational trait of Gopa families.

Historical references, including Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*, associate Gopas with both governance and cattle rearing, further reinforcing the possibility of Sujata's Yadava lineage.

1.2.2. Traditional narratives and folk beliefs

In Sri Lankan Buddhist traditions, Sujata is sometimes referred to as a Gopalini (cowherdess), reinforcing her connection to pastoral Yadava culture.

Bhikkhu scholars such as Panditananda and Mahabodhi Society researchers have speculated on her Gopa background, citing oral traditions and regional narratives.

Indian folklore, particularly in Bihar, continues to identify Sujata as a member of a cowherding community.

1.2.3. Socio-Cultural Context and Caste Significance

The Gopa or Yadava identity was historically prominent in Vaishnava traditions, but their influence is also evident in Buddhist narratives. Sujata's act of generosity and her association with dairy production align closely with Yadava traditions, which emphasize cattle rearing and milk-based rituals.

The combination of textual, linguistic, and historical evidence strongly supports this possibility. The enduring folk traditions, linguistic parallels, and caste-based occupational alignments provide compelling support for Sujata's Yadava (Gopa) lineage.

2. Historical Lineage

To determine Sujata's lineage, clan, and caste, one must rely on original Pali literature and Buddhist scriptures. Regarding Sujata, it is written in the *Anguttara Nikaya* (One Nipata Commentary, *Sujata Vatthu*, p. 298), **"The laywoman (Upāsikā) Pāliya states: 'Among those who first go for refuge, all are established in refuge. Sujata, the daughter of Senani, is declared as the foremost among them.'**

Having wandered through the cycle of rebirths (samsara) for a hundred thousand eons among gods and humans, prior to the final birth of our Blessed Teacher, she was born in the house of the wealthy Senani in the village of Senanigama in Uruvela. Upon reaching maturity, she made a vow under a banyan tree: 'If I go to a noble family in marriage, I will prepare a great offering of rice porridge (payasa) and make a vow to fulfill my promise annually.' Her aspiration was fulfilled.

One day, Sujata, upon witnessing these marvelous signs, joyfully informed her servant: 'Mother, today our deity is extremely pleased with us.'

The Bodhisattva, after attaining enlightenment near the Nerañjara River, arrived at its bank and placed a golden bowl there. Having bathed, he divided the food into forty-nine portions and consumed the rice porridge. He then let the golden bowl float down the river.

That night, the head of the household, after completing his duties, saw a vision of Sujata's house and became filled with great emotion.

The Blessed One, recalling the past aspirations of the noble son, went to his house. After he had finished his meal, he delivered a discourse on the Dhamma. At the conclusion of the discourse, Sujata, along with Yasa's

mother and another noblewoman, attained the fruit of stream-entry (Sotapatti-phala). That very day, Sujata firmly established herself in verbal refuge (in the Triple Gem) along with others who listened.

Later, the Blessed One, while arranging the ranks of laywomen in their respective places of honour, declared: 'This laywoman Sujata is the foremost among those who first go for refuge.'

Now, let us examine Sujata in the text *Lalitavistara*. This text is regarded as the first *Mahakavya* (great epic) of the Sanskrit literary tradition. Its language is closely related to Prakrit, specifically Pali (Magadhi). In *Lalitavistara*, both Sanskrit and Prakrit linguistic features, including vocabulary and grammar, are present.

On page 520 of *Lalitavistara*, it is written:

In the village of Uruvilva, Sujata, the daughter of the village chief Nandika, was awakened at midnight by the gods, who informed her that the one for whom she was performing the great sacrifice (*bali-karma*) had completed his austerities and would now partake in a divine meal. Upon hearing the words of the gods, Sujata, the daughter of the village chief Nandika (or Nandabala), quickly collected the essence of milk from a thousand cows, repeating the process seven times to obtain the finest and purest milk. She then prepared a rich, superior dish with this milk. Taking this fresh milk, she cooked *kheer* (sweet rice porridge) using newly harvested rice and instructed her maidservant Uttara (Punna): "*Uttara, go!*"

When the Bodhisattva received the meal, he asked Sujata, the village chief's daughter, "*Sister, what should be done with this golden bowl?*"

Sujata replied, "*It belongs to you. Do as you wish. I do not offer food without the bowl.*"

Thereafter, the Bodhisattva proceeded from Uruvela to the Naga River (*Nairanjana*). After bathing, he consumed the honeyed *payasa* (*kheer*). Upon finishing, he discarded the golden bowl into the water with indifference. As soon as the bowl was cast into the river, the Naga King of the ocean respectfully took it and carried it to his palace.

Seeing this, Purandara (Indra), the thousand-eyed deity, assumed the form of Garuda, creating a thunderous sound with his beak, and attempted to snatch the golden bowl from the Naga King. Failing to seize it, he then humbly requested it as an offering for a *Chaitya* (sacred monument) and took it to the celestial realm of the *Trayastrimsas* (the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods) for worship.

Dr. Raghunath Singh writes in *Buddha-Katha* (p. 31):

"In the beautiful Uruvela region, there was a large village named Senani. In this village, a precious daughter named Sujata was born. She was the daughter of the wealthy Senani household. Her father was a highly respected householder. She belonged to an affluent family. Sujata was noble by birth (*sujata*). She was also called Nandabala. Her hair was black and thick, her beauty was divine, her body radiant, and her speech sweet."

Sujata's son was Yasa. He too renounced the world and attained *Arhatship* (enlightenment). Yasa's father came searching for him. Upon meeting the Buddha, he listened to his teachings and invited him for a meal. The Buddha, along with Yasa, visited his home. After the meal, upon listening to the Buddha's discourse, Sujata and Yasa's wife attained the *Sotapanna* (first stage of enlightenment). On that very day, Sujata, along with three others, took refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, in his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, writes:

- (a) In Uruvela, there was a householder named Senani. His daughter's name was Sujata.
- (b) Sujata had vowed to make an offering every year.
- (c) Sujata had sent her maidservant Punna to prepare the site for worship.
- (d) Sujata offered the *kheer* (rice pudding) in a golden bowl to Siddhartha Gautama. Siddhartha Gautama accepted the golden bowl and, after bathing at the riverbank called Supatittha, consumed the meal.

2.1. Was Sujata an "untouchable" ?

– The term *Senani* means commander or general. Sujata's father had once served as the commander of an army for a kingdom. That is why he was referred to as *Senani*. This also proves that Sujata belonged to a warrior lineage. She was a *dharma-vir* (a devout woman of a heroic family).

Her father was so influential that the region where they lived, Uruvela, became known as *Senani Village* in his honor. Calling the daughter of such an influential figure an *untouchable* would be an act of great audacity.

The word *Uruvela* itself has a meaningful etymology. *Uru* means "sand," and *vela* means "shore," making *Uruvela* a land whose name aligns with its geographical significance. Similarly, the name *Senani Village* and *Sujata* also reflect nobility. She was a girl of high birth and belonged to an esteemed family, as her name suggests (*Su-jata* = well-born).

In the time of the Buddha, names were often given based on notable qualities. For instance, *Anathapindika* was named because he provided food (*pinda*) to orphans (*anatha*). Likewise, *Sujata* was named in a way that reflected her noble qualities. In Pali literature, 85% of names follow this pattern of meaningful naming, which now serves as historical evidence.

2.1.1. Sujata's father belonged to the "householder" (*Grihapati*) class, a term synonymous with wealth and status in Pali literature – The term *Grihapati* is equivalent to *Sresthi* (wealthy merchant or nobleman). In ancient times, wealth was measured in cattle (*go*), and those who owned large herds were called *Sresthis* (rich men, merchants, or landlords). This is why both *Dhaniya Gopa* and *Yasa* were referred to as *Setthi-putta* (sons of a rich merchant).

Nowhere in Pali literature are the terms *Senani*, *Seniya*, *Grihapati*, or *Sresthi* used for lower castes or untouchables. Calling Sujata an *untouchable girl* is sheer ignorance.

Sujata's son, *Yasa*, was a wealthy, noble, and religious householder from Varanasi. Yasa had four friends, all sons of wealthy families from Varanasi—Vimala, Subahu, Purnajit, and Gavampati.

If Sujata were an *untouchable*, the great Buddhist scholar Dr. B. R. Ambedkar would have surely included her son, Yasa, in his section on "*the ordination of people from lower castes*" in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*. In that section, he mentioned figures such as the barber Upali, the sweeper Sunita, the outcaste Sopaka, Suppiya, Sumangala the plowman, Dhaniya the potter, and others.

However, Dr. Ambedkar did not include Yasa in this category. Instead, he classified Yasa under "*The Ordination of the Noble and Religious*"—a section that includes the Kashyapa family, Sariputta-Moggallana, King Bimbisara, and Anathapindika. This further confirms that Yasa was the son of a noble and wealthy family, making Sujata a high-born woman (*Sujata* = well-born).

Sujata's noble birth is confirmed by the following factors:

1. She was the daughter of *Senani* (Seniy, Senapati, Senanayak – meaning a commander or general).
2. She was the daughter of a *Grihapati* (householder or nobleman).
3. She was the daughter of a *Sresthi* (a wealthy merchant or leader).
4. She was born into a prosperous and affluent family.
5. She became the mother of *Yasa*, a highly esteemed disciple of the Buddha.
6. Her name, *Sujata*, meaning "well-born" or "of noble birth."
7. She had a maidservant named Purna (Uttara).
8. Traditional folklore and oral traditions.
9. She made an offering with a golden bowl filled with *kheer* (rice pudding) prepared from the milk of a thousand cows.
10. Her family owned thousands of cows.

3. Determining Sujata's Caste

Now, the question arises: To which caste did Sujata belong? To determine this, one must examine her ancestral occupation. A strong indication of her lineage can be found in her *Manoti-Kheer* (votive offering of rice pudding).

People customarily worship their deities with offerings of their most accessible and cherished items. Sujata did the same—she sent a thousand cows to graze in the *Yashti-Madhu* forest, then fed their milk to another five hundred cows. This process continued in halves until the milk of the last eight cows was used to prepare *kheer*. This is the *kheer* that Sujata offered to the Buddha.

Buddhist literature states that Sujata performed an annual *vat-vriksha* (banyan tree) worship ritual by offering a thousand pots of *kheer*. Doesn't this tradition indicate that she belonged to the *Gop* (cowherd)

community? Her annual vow of offering further supports the claim that she was indeed a *Gop* girl. The fact that she personally contributed *kheer* made from the milk of thousands of cows—without purchasing it from others—points directly to her *Gop* heritage.

If, despite such overwhelming evidence, someone is still unable to determine Sujata's caste, they must be suffering from a severe intellectual deficiency. What else could be said about such a person?

3.1. The Status of the Gop Community in Ancient India

Many scholars believe that during the Buddha's time, Vedic religion was dominant. If that were true, how could Sujata, supposedly an *untouchable* girl, have a father who held the title of *Senani* (Seniy, Senanayak – a military commander)? Pali literature even refers to King Bimbisara as *Seniy*. Was he an *untouchable*?

The very term *Senani* or *Seniy* proves that Sujata's father was a nobleman of the *Gop* community. According to Panini, *Gop* refers to someone responsible for protection. *Rajatarangini* describes *Gop* as the protectors and defenders of the land. The *Medini Shabdakosh* defines *Gop* as *Prithvi-palaka* (guardian of the earth).

The *Mahabharata* (Udyoga Parva) states:

"Matsanhanan tulyanam gopanam burda mahat,
Narayana iti khyata, sarve sangrama yodhinah."

Translation:

"I have one billion Gop warriors. They are as strong as me and all of them are great fighters in war. They are known as the Narayani army."

This excerpt shows that in ancient India, military command (*Senani*, *Seniy*, *Senapati*) was often held by *Gops*. Based on this, Sujata, the daughter of *Senani*, must have been a *Gop* girl.

I firmly believe that *Seniy*, *Sresthi*, and *Grihapati* were never *untouchables*, nor will they ever be. Even the oldest Pali literature never uses these terms to describe Shudras, *untouchables*, or oppressed classes.

Some people claim that Sujata belonged to a *Kunbi* family and use this to argue that she was an *untouchable*. However, the term *Kunbi* is not found in Pali literature. Therefore, calling Sujata a *Kunbi* is nothing more than ignorant speculation.

Pali literature states:

"Uruvelaja (from the Uruvela region) Senanigane (in a village called Senani) in the house of Seniy Senapati Ronani (a noble family), Sujata was born."

Some attempt to distort the meaning of *Kutumbik* in this passage, equating it with *Kunbi*, to claim that Sujata was of a lower caste. However, this interpretation is entirely incorrect. The word *Kutumbik* is derived from *Kutumb* (family), meaning "one belonging to a family"—a relative, a family member, or kin—not *Kunba* or *Kunbi*.

According to the *Nalanda Vishal Hindi Shabd Sagar*, the word *Kunba* refers to a metalworker (particularly a *Thathera*—brass or copper smith). *Kunbi* means "one who listens properly only when beaten." If *Kunbi* is equated with *Kurmi*, it still aligns with Sujata being a *Gop* girl.

The *Varna Viveka Chandrika* states that Vishwakarma's wife, *Prabhavati*, was a *Gop* girl, and from her came *Kuvindaka*, from whom *Kothari* and *Kurmi* descended. This historical reference suggests that *Koyri* (Kushwaha) and *Kurmi* communities were once part of the *Gop* lineage but separated during the Turk-Mughal period.

By the 13th century, when India was under complete foreign rule, the vast *Gop* community split into three major groups:

1. **The Brave and Warrior-like** – Those who continued their traditional pastoral lifestyle and moved to forests with their cattle. They retained their identity as *Gop* or *Ahir*.
2. **The Wealthy and Non-Warrior Farmers** – Those who engaged in large-scale agriculture and were later called *Kunbi* or *Kurmi*.
3. **The Poor and Timid Agriculturists** – Those who took up small-scale vegetable farming and became known as *Kachhi-Koyri* (Kushwaha).

These three groups share a common ancestry, which cannot be denied.

History shows that the father of Chhatrapati Shivaji, Shahaji Bhonsle, was a *Kurmi*, while his mother was from the *Yadava* lineage of Devagiri. This further demonstrates the close relationship between the *Yadav* and *Kurmi* communities. Until the 12th century, even the worship of Lord Rama (*Dasharathi Ram*) and Lord Krishna (*Ras-Bihari Krishna*) was not widely prevalent—history confirms this. The original faith of these three communities was Buddhism.

Calling *Kurmi* (*Kunbi*) an untouchable caste is pure ignorance.

3.2. Sujata's True Caste Based on Her Occupation and Family Lineage

A person's caste has traditionally been determined by their ancestral profession. Sujata's father was a *Senani* (military commander), and she belonged to a wealthy cattle-rearing family. These facts strongly establish that Sujata was born into a noble and warrior-class *Gop* family.

Labeling Sujata as an *untouchable* instead of a *Gop* girl is nothing but casteist bias and foolish stubbornness. If a blacksmith (*Lohar*) is recognized by their profession, a goldsmith (*Sunar*) by theirs, a weaver (*Julaha*) by theirs, a leatherworker (*Chamar*) by theirs, a sweeper (*Bhangi*) by theirs, and a crematorium worker (*Dom*) by theirs, then why hesitate to call a girl from a cattle-rearing family a *Gop-Kanya* (cowherd girl)?

This hesitation exists only because acknowledging the ancient importance of the *Gop* community would elevate its historical status. Caste has always been determined by occupation, and by this standard, Sujata was undoubtedly a *Gop-Kanya*.

Pali literature frequently refers to the Buddha as *Gop-Mukhi* (best among the *Gops*) and to Princess Yashodhara as *Gopa*, *Gopi*, and *Gopika*. However, it does not explicitly use such terms for Sujata. Nevertheless, her background and occupation leave no doubt about her noble lineage.

If the term *Gop* means *cowherd* and *Gwala* means *one who keeps cows*, then based on this definition, Sujata was undoubtedly a *Yadavi* (*Gwalini*).

Traditional folklore also supports this claim, stating that Sujata was a *Gwalini*. The people from the region where Sujata was born, as well as Buddhist countries, believe that she was a *Gop-Kanya*. Even in Sri Lanka, Buddhist scholars like Bhante Panditananda and Mahabodhi Society's Assistant General Secretary M. Vimalasara have stated that Sujata was *Yadavi*. Similarly, the president of the Bihar Bhikkhu Sangha, Bhikkhu Pragya Deep, has acknowledged Sujata as a *Gop-Kanya*. However, they were unable to provide concrete evidence.

It must be acknowledged that historical distortions by cunning Vedic scholars have played a significant role in erasing the true identities of great Indian figures. Their attitude remains unchanged even today. They want to destroy whatever remains of Sujata's true caste identity because they recognize her unparalleled contribution to the growth of Buddhism and the Sangha. Acknowledging this contribution as the glory of the *Gop* (*Yadav*) community is unbearable for them.

Instead, they prefer to keep these communities entangled in the mythological stories of *Ram* and *Krishna*. Moving away from these myths would mean awakening to reality—something that *Savarna* oppressors find intolerable. Just as the *Manu Smriti* was replaced by *Ambedkar's Constitution*, which troubles them greatly, the recognition of historical truths continues to challenge their dominance.

3.3. Final Conclusion: Sujata was a Gop-Kanya

The following evidence supports Sujata's identity as a *Gop-Kanya*:

3.3.1. Possession of Thousands of Cows

Sujata had thousands of cows, confirming that she was a *Gop-Kanya* (*Gwalini*).

For preparing her *Manoti Kheer* (offering pudding), she used the milk from $(1000+500+250+125+62+31+16+8) = 1992$ cows.

Considering how much milk was used for this ritual, imagine how many more cows she must have kept for her family's regular needs.

She must have produced butter and ghee from this milk and sold it. What else can a person engaged in such a profession be called other than a *cowherd*?

3.3.2. Her Father Was a Seniy (Nandik/Nandwal Seniy)

Pali literature refers to King Bimbisara as *Seniy*. *Rajatarangini*, *Medini Shabdakosh*, *Mahabharata*, and *Panini's works* confirm that *Seniy* is synonymous with *Gop*.

3.3.3. Association with the Naga Lineage

History proves that King Bimbisara, a *Seniy*, belonged to the *Naga lineage*. The *Nagas* are also referred to as *Ahivanshi (descendants of the serpent race)*. This means that *Seniy (Gop)* can also be called *Ahir*. Since Sujata was from the *Seniy* community, she too can be identified as an *Ahirni (female Ahir)*.

3.3.4. Sujata as the Mother of Setthi-Putra Yash

Setthi in ancient times referred to a person who owned a large number of cows. *Paniya Gop* was also called a *Setthi-Putra*. Since Yash, Sujata's son, was referred to as *Setthi-Putra*, it further confirms that Sujata belonged to the *Gopi* community.

3.3.5. Even today, in traditional folklore, Sujata is referred to as a *Gwalini* (cowherd woman).

3.3.6. Pali literature contains the phrase *Balikambha Karistani*, which indicates that Sujata made a vow for *Balikambha*. The term *Balikambha* means *Bali-Karma* or *Maha-Yajna* (a great sacrificial ritual). However, unlike Vedic culture, sacrifices in the *Shramana* tradition did not involve violence. Sujata, being part of the *Shramana* culture, was a *Gopujak* (worshiper of cows).

3.3.7. The book *Bharat* correctly states: "*The civilization, culture, religion, and language of this country are all contributions of the Ahirs.*"

3.3.8. In almost every Hindu village, people worship *Goraiya (Goria) Baba*. But who is he? The word *Goraiya* comes from *Gor + ya*, meaning *one associated with Gor (cows)*. Now, the question arises: what does *Gor* mean?

Today, *Gor* or *Gaur* is commonly associated with fair skin, but earlier, it signified a respected human lineage. The word *Gor* is derived from *Go (cow) + r*, meaning *one associated with cows*, i.e., a *Gop (cowherd)*.

3.3.9. Lord Shiva's divine consort, *Gauri*, also derives her name from *Gaur*, which directly relates to *Gwalinis* (cowherd women). This explanation clarifies the significance of *Goraiya (Goria) Baba* and highlights the historical importance of the *Gop* community.

One branch of the Yadavs is still known as *Goria (Gor-ia)*. The downfall of this community began when Vedic Brahmins became their religious leaders. By the 12th-13th century, their dominance in India had completely vanished. During this period, they were victims of a massive conspiracy and collective massacre. This genocide is known as the *Naga-Yajna*, *Mahabharata War*, and *Yadav-Vinasha* (destruction of the Yadavs).

Relevance to the society

The story of this catastrophic destruction is well documented in the *Mahabharata* and *Quran*. Even the saint *Kabir Das* acknowledged this event in his *Bijak Granth*, writing:

"O Pandit, understand and drink water carefully," Fifty-six crore Yadavas perished,
"Along with eighty-eight thousand sages."

Those who consider others as lowly, untouchable, Shudra, or outcast while regarding themselves as supremely noble and high-born must read this text or similar books. It is with this very purpose that I have written this text.

In reality, caste is merely a human-made organized group. If caste is bound by morality, it may be acceptable; otherwise, it becomes a dangerous and infectious disease. Morality holds greater significance than even God. That is why in Buddhism, there is no God—only morality.

"The essence of Buddhism is morality," And the whole world bows before it."

Morality leads to values, and values shape culture. It is the duty of every Indian to protect Indian culture. Every nation's morality is unique, differing in its own way.

Conclusion

Sujata's lineage, caste, and social status can be determined through Buddhist scriptures, particularly Pali literature. The Anguttara Nikaya identifies Sujata as the daughter of Senani from Senanigama in Uruvela. She was a devoted laywoman (Upāsikā) who first took refuge in the Buddha, earning her the title of the foremost among them. She fulfilled a vow by offering rice porridge (payasa) to the Buddha before his enlightenment, an act of deep religious significance.

The Lalitavistara, an early Sanskrit epic, provides another account, referring to Sujata as the daughter of village chief Nandika (or Nandabala). It describes her divine inspiration to prepare a sacred meal using the essence of milk from a thousand cows. She offered this meal to the Bodhisattva, who consumed it before achieving enlightenment. This account highlights Sujata's noble lineage and her role in Buddhist tradition.

Dr. Raghunath Singh's research and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's writings further establish Sujata's high birth. Ambedkar confirms her father, Senani, was a respected householder, reinforcing her noble status. Sujata's son, Yasa, also became an Arhat, and his ordination into Buddhism aligns with high-caste traditions. Ambedkar did not classify Yasa among lower-caste converts, supporting the argument that Sujata was of noble birth.

The term "Senani" translates to "commander" or "general," indicating Sujata's father's military role. This title was associated with the warrior class, contradicting claims that Sujata was an untouchable. Pali literature frequently associates terms like Grihapati (householder) and Sresthi (wealthy merchant) with Sujata's family, reinforcing their elite social status. Additionally, Sujata's possession of thousands of cows suggests she belonged to the Gop (cowherd) community.

Determining Sujata's caste requires examining her ancestral occupation. She performed annual banyan tree worship by offering kheer prepared from thousands of cows' milk, a tradition linked to the Gop community. Historical texts suggest that the Gop community had military and administrative roles, and they were

regarded as protectors, as seen in Panini's and Rajatarangini's descriptions. The Mahabharata also references Gop warriors in the Narayani army.

Thus, Sujata was a noble-born Gop-Kanya (cowherd girl) from a wealthy and influential family. Her father's title of Senani, her family's cattle wealth, her religious offerings, and her son's esteemed status in Buddhism all confirm her high social standing. Any claim that she was an untouchable is historically unfounded and reflects a misinterpretation of Buddhist texts and historical records.

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