



## The life of Sujātā: A woman from Sena village, praised by the Buddha

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### Abstract

Sujata was the wife of a farmer, who is said to have fed Gautama Buddha a bowl of kheer, milk-rice pudding, ending his six years of penance. Her emaciated form was such that she wrongly believed that she was a tree-spirit who gave her the desire to have a child. The gift gave him enough strength to cultivate the Middle Path, develop wisdom and attain Bodhi, who then became known as the Buddha. Bakraur village near Bodh Gaya is considered to be his home. The Sujata Stupa was dedicated to him there in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. According to the Jātakas, Siddhartha gave up his austerities after taking food from Sujata, a girl from Senānīgāma (identified with Bakraur near Gayā), a village located not very far from the Bodhi tree. According to the Majjhima Nikāya, the Buddha described the village and its surroundings as 'a beautiful stretch of ground, a lovely woodland grove, a clear flowing river with a beautiful ford, a village nearby for support, a suitable place for making an effort'. Therefore, in this paper, would like to highlight the life of Sujata and her help to Buddha for the enlightenment. In this way, the main objective of this paper is to introduce the life of Sujata and her contribution in Buddhism.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, life of sujata, jātakas, and so on

### Introduction

Sujata lived in a village called Senani in Uruvela (near present-day Bodh Gaya); she was the beautiful but unmarried daughter of a wealthy landowner. She began to pray on the advice of villagers who believed in a tree-dwelling god on a nuga (banyan) tree near the Niranjana River; one who will fulfill her desire for a good husband, who will shower her with love and gifts, was given in time. Then she went to pray for a child. This wish also came true. On the day of Veshakha (full moon) along with her friend Punna, she used to offer milk and rice to the tree deity. Sujata was the owner of many cows. She used to feed sweet creepers to her cows to get the most nutritious milk. She used this milk to make rice-milk porridge.

The Sujata Stupa, built on her home site, is across the river from the Mahabodhi Temple in the Bakraur village within Bodhgaya area, northeast India of state of Bihar. Although it was a low hill covered with small trees, a bridge across the river has made it readily accessible. Excavations conducted by the Indian Archaeological Survey there in 1973-74 and again in 2001-06 uncovered a Stupa with a round, two-level, terraced structure 11 meters high on a square east-west, north-south platform. The Stupa reveals traces of three phases of additions and expansion from the Gupta to the Pala period. The first-phase, fired-brick, clockwise path is narrow with a surrounding wall of fired brick.

Noteworthy traces indicate the existence of a wooden railing around the ground-level surrounding path. This was widened to five meters in later expansions and thickly covered in lime plaster. In third-phase additions, a lime-plastered, fired-brick surrounding wall was added with railings on four sides and an open gate on each side. A simple lime-plastered clockwise path was added between the surrounding fence and the gates. A fired-brick platform in front of one of the gates was probably used as a gathering place. The purpose of two brick constructions on the inner side of the gate is uncertain. The Stupa grew quite significant in the final expansion phase, reaching a maximum diameter of 65.5 meters. The dating of the building and expansion of each level is unclear, but the initial phase of the residence site is thought to be from the second to the first century B.C.

This estimation is made based on shards of dark gray polished ceramic ware excavated from a building thought to be the remains of a temple neighboring the Stupa site on the northeast. Terracotta seals and small plaques reinforce the dating of the final expansion from the eighth to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The attitudes of monarchs of the Pala dynasty toward Buddhism assumed that the surrounding walls, railings, and gates were erected in this period. An excavated inscription dates from the eighth to the ninth century. The house of Sujata of King Deva Pala (ruled 810 to 850) makes sure that the Stupa was built as a memorial to Sujata. Also excavated from this locale is part of a golden earring, a small terracotta brooch, punch-marked coins, a stone Buddha head and torso, body ornaments, and terracotta seals. True, on this day, I will undoubtedly become a Buddha. When daybreak arrived (on the morning of the full-moon day), he cleansed his body and left that place; and when he arrived at

the banyan tree, which was visited every day for worship by Sujata, the daughter of a wealthy man, he stopped and sat down at the base of the tree facing east while waiting for the time to go round for alms; and thus the entire banyan tree shone brilliantly with his body radiance.

### Life of Sujata

Sujata, the daughter of a wealthy man named Sena, had prayed at the foot of the banyan tree in the market town of Sena in the region of *Uruvela* forest when she was of legal age: “*Guardian angel of the banyan tree, if I am married into a rich family of the same caste, I shall honor you by presenting you with a milk-rice (Ghana) gift*”. Sujata’s prayer has been heard and answered. So, the daughter of a wealthy guy every year on the full-moon day of *Vesakha*, Sujata had been honoring the Guardian Deva of the Banyan Tree with Ghana milk-rice. Suppose care is not taken when reading the account of Sujata’s offering of milk rice.

In that case, readers are apt to believe that Sujata paid homage to the Guardian Deva of the Banyan Tree with the first offering of milk-rice on that full-moon day of *Vesakha*, the day on which the *Bodhisattva* was to attain Buddhahood. In Truth, the plea had been answered, and the Banyan Tree Guardian Deva had been worshipped with milk-rice offerings for nearly twenty years before that day. Because Sujata’s stated son was the wealthy young man *Yasa*, who was already married and living in the luxury of a wealthy family in the year of the Buddha’s birth, In light of this, it’s worth noting that the rich man’s daughter Sujata had been honoring the Guardian Deva of the Banyan Tree with Ghana milk-rice gifts every year on the full-moon day of *Vesakha* for the last twenty years when her desire for a firstborn son was granted.

Lady Sujata’s preparations for making gifts to the Guardian Deva of the Banyan Tree on the Full Moon of *Vesakha*, after the *Bodhisattva* had finished six years of *dukkaracariya* practice: <sup>[1]</sup> She initially let a thousand milch cows graze in the licorice woods, and the milk gained from these milch cows was given to another 500 milch cows; <sup>[2]</sup> the milk generated by these 500 cows was fed to another 250 cows <sup>[3]</sup> The milk from the 250 cows was then given to another 125 cows; <sup>[4]</sup> the milk from these 125 cows was given to another 64 cows <sup>[5]</sup> The milk from the sixty-four cows was then distributed to the other thirty-two cows <sup>[6]</sup> The milk from the remaining sixteen cows was then fed to the thirty-two cows <sup>[7]</sup>. The milk from these sixteen cows was then distributed to the other eight cows. In this way, lady Sujata took the above step-by-step milk transfer procedure to obtain thick, savory, and nutritious cow’s milk to prepare milk-rice. With this goal, I’ll prepare the sacrificial gift of Ghana milk rice early today. On the full-moon day of *Vesakha*, Lady Sujata got up early and had the eight milch cows milked. The calves did not approach the ducts of their mother milch cows since they were not tied with rope. What was astonishing was that the milk continued to drip down in plenty despite the milk dish being placed near the udder. Seeing such a spectacular event, Lady Sujata grabbed the naturally flowing milk and put it into a new pot with her own hands, as well as kindling the fire with her own hands to create Ghana milk-rice.

### Sujata’s contribution for promotion of buddhism

During the period of *Padumuttara* Buddha, the future Sujata was reborn into the household of a wealthy man in the city of *Hamsavati*. She witnessed a female lay disciple being designated by the Buddha as the foremost in being entrenched in the Three Refuges while listening to a speech by the Buddha. She longed to be a part of that exclusive group. She expressed her aspiration before the Buddha, who prophesied that her aspiration would be fulfilled after making an extraordinary offering. The future *Sujātā* was reborn either in the Deva-world or the human world for a hundred thousand world-cycles. Sometime before the appearance of the Buddha, she was reborn as the daughter of Sena in the village of Sena, near the *Uruvela* forest. When she reached adulthood, she went to a nearby banyan tree. She made an offering to its guardian spirit, vowing that if she married a bridegroom of equal social position (of the same clan) and produced a boy as her first child, she would make an annual offering to the guardian spirit. Her request was granted (Sujata was married to the son of the Rich Man of *Bras* and had a son named *Yasa* as her first child. She maintained her word and made annual offerings to the banyan tree’s guardian ghost.

Sujata went to make her yearly offering to the guardian spirit of the banyan tree on the day the Buddha was to acquire Perfect Enlightenment in the year 103 of the Great Era, after making these annual offerings at the banyan tree almost twenty times. Sujata’s son, *Yasa*, was already married at the time and living lavishly in the three palaces. This is highlighted because Sujata was commonly depicted as a young woman when she presented the Buddha with the specially prepared milk rice.) The Buddha acquired Perfect Enlightenment on the full moon of *Kason* (May) in the 103rd Maha Era, after six years of self-tormenting practice in search of the Truth. Sujata got up early the next day to make an early offering to the banyan tree. The young calves did not approach their mothers for milk on that particular day. The nipples of the cows spontaneously flowed abundantly with milk when the housemaids of Sujata brought the vessels to take milk from them. After witnessing the unexpected phenomenon, Sujata collected the milk, placed it in a new cooking vessel, lit the fire, and began cooking the rice milk.

Extra-large bubbles erupted in succession as the milk was cooked, rotating clockwise in the pot, and not a drop of milk foam overflowed. The Mah Brahm held the white umbrella above the bank, and the Four Great Guardian Devas of the World guarded it with their royal swords in hand. *Sakka* took care of the fire that cooked the milk, and devas brought various nutrients from the four island continents and placed them in the pot. The celestial beings joined *Sujata*’s effort in preparing the milk price in this way. “*Pleasant girl Sujata exclaimed as she was preparing the rice milk*”, I suppose the guardian spirit of the banyan tree is in a perfect mood because I have

never seen such weird things happen before in these long years. “*Now hastily tidy the precinct in preparation for an offering at the banyan tree*”.

“Very well, Madam”, the servant girl replied, and she quickly went to the banyan tree. Early in the morning, the Buddha-to-be sat at the foot of the banyan tree, collecting his daily alms-food. The servant girl who went to scrub the banyan tree’s feet misunderstood the Bodhisattva as the tree’s guardian spirit, and she excitedly reported it to her mistress. “Well, girl”, Sujata continued, “If what you say is true, I will free you from your shackles. Sujata then dressed and decorated herself before going to the banyan tree with the milk-rice on her head, which was placed in a golden vessel worth one lakh, covered with a golden lid, wrapped in a white piece of cloth, and garlands of fragrant flowers hung around the boat. She was delighted to see the Bodhisattva, whom she assumed to be the tree’s guardian spirit, and approached him with a series of small bows. “*May your desire come to completion as it has mine? She said as she set the vessel down, removed the lid, and presented it to the Bodhisattva. She then walked away from him*”.

The Bodhisattva walked to the *Nerajar* River, where he placed the golden vessel of rice ilk on the river’s bank and had a bath. He then ate the rice milk in forty-nine morsels after exiting the river. He then tossed the empty gold vessel into the *Nerajar* River. It sank after floating against the current of the river. He then proceeded to the foot of the Enlightenment Tree. He obtained Perfect Self-Enlightenment and stayed there for seven weeks, visiting seven different sites around the Tree of Enlightenment each week. After forty-nine days (during which the Buddha dwelled in the achievement of cessation), he traveled to *Isipatnam Migadavana* woodland to set the Wheel of Dhamma rolling by expounding the *Dhamma* to the Group of Five ascetics. Then he observed the ripening of *Yasa*’s past merit as the son of Sujata, wife of the householder of *Bras*, and sat beneath a tree, waiting for him. “Every manner of filth afflicts body!” Defilements are tormenting them, “*Yasa* grumbled as he walked out of his house, disgusted with life. He met the Buddha after leaving town. After listening to his talk, he obtained a penetrating understanding of the Truth and established himself in the Fruition of Stream-Entry Knowledge (He got the three lower *magga* and palaces in the Commentary on the *Anguttara Nikaya*.)

*Yasa*’s father tracked his son down to within a few feet of him. He went to the Buddha and inquired if his son had come that way. The Buddha shielded *Yasa* from his father’s vision through his power and delivered a sermon to him. *Yasa*’s father received Stream-Entry Knowledge, and *Yasa* received arahantship due to this. The Buddha then made *Yasa* a *Bhikkhu* by calling him up and saying, “Come, *Bhikkhu*” and *Yasa*’s appearance transformed into that of a *Bhikkhu*, replete with an alms-bowl, robes, and other *Bhikkhu*-related objects. All of these were created by the Buddha’s might. *Bhikkhu*’s, among my female lay-disciples who were the first to get established in the Refuges, Sujata, and daughter of *Seniya* (*Sena*) the householder, is the foremost, the Buddha said at one point, referring to prominent female lay-disciples. Sujata, a daughter of the rich man, was praised by the Buddha on donating alms food to the Buddha on becoming a Buddha, helping her husband and son attains *Nibbana*. Sujata is a good woman who should admire her secular and religious duties and be a role model for every woman. That is why all-female lay-devotees in Buddhism follow her activity on promoting and preserving for the sake of *Sasana*.

## Conclusion

Sujata occupies a very important and significant place in the history of Buddhism. She offered milk-rice to Siddhartha, after he had undergone severe physical austerities for six years in guest of salvation in village Uruvilva, present in Bodh Gaya, Bihar on the bank of river Niranjana. The physical austerities had reduced the prince to a stimulated to invigorate him with a rejuvenated energy. She prayed to God for the blissing of a son and pledged to offer milk-rice preparation to the God of the Banyan tree nearby if her prayer was accepted. The boon was granted and a son was born to her. In accordance with her vow Sujata deputed her maid Punna to dress up the place for offering the preparation. The man was no one else but the prince Siddhartha who gained enlightenment on that very day to emancipate the humanity from miseries of worldly existence and came to known popularly as Gautama Buddha.

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