CHAPTER III
VEDIC POPULAR ASSEMBLIES
Evidence of a high degree of administrative organisation in the tribal society of Vedic Aryans is found in Vedic literature. The society was divided into small monarchical States headed by Rājnyas. To this there are many literary references. Were these Rājnyas autocrats? Was there any popular check on them? Were there any assemblies which regulated the governmental organisation and restrained the king's autocracy? Could these assemblies be compared with modern parliaments? Answers to these questions are found in Vedic literature. Some assemblies existed in the contemporary period, which are referred to in the Rgveda and later literature and which formed an essential feature of the Government. These assemblies were called the Sabhā and the Samiti. References occur also to one Vidātatra.

Vedic people, who were quite democratic in their political organisation and very alert in respect of their political rights, frequently met in these assemblies and discussed matters of elementary village administration, though not like modern parliaments.

There is a great deal of controversy over the Sabhā and the Samiti as referred to in Vedic literature. Were these assemblies popular in character? When did
they originate? What were the functions they performed? Did they check the monarch from becoming an autocrat and acting arbitrarily? What was the relation between these two assemblies? To these questions the Indologists give different answers. We shall discuss their opinions below.

**SABHĀ**

The Sabhā is mentioned eight times in the Ṛgveda, but its exact character is not certain. The expression Sabhā literally means 'a body of men shining together'.¹ It occurs frequently in a variety of senses in the Ṛgveda and later literature,² it denotes both people in conclave and a hall. The hall was clearly used for dicing.³ In Vājsaneyī Sāhita⁴ the expression Sabhācara is used for a member of judicial tribunals. In the Sūtras the term Sabhā means an assembly of the people and an assembly hall.⁵ In the Vāyu Purāṇa it is mentioned in different

¹Cf. Jayarama; Pārs. G.S. III. 13, 1. यह अर्ण्ड शक्षितार्थ विधिविति सपा

²Rv. VII. 28, 6; VIII. 4, 9; X. 34, 6; Av. V. 31, 6; VII. 12, 1, 2; VIII. 10, 5; XII. 1, 56; 56, 6; Taṅkt. Saṁ. I. 7, 6, 7; Mait. Saṁ. IV. 7, 4; Vāj. Saṁ. III. 45; XVI. 24; Xx. 17; Taṅkt. Br. I. 1, 10, 6; Sat. Br. II. 3, 2, 3; V. 3, 1, 10; Kauś. Br. VII. 9. etc.

³Rv. X. 34, 6; Av. XII. 3, 46 (here Dyūta is used in place of Sabhā).


senses for a temple, mansion, royal court, etc. The Sabhā of the Vāyu suggests later connotation of the term having its origin in the sense of the 'hall' of Vedic times. In the Epics the Sabhā means an assembly of any sort.

**Nature and Composition of Sabhā**

The Sabhā might have been a tribal assembly when there were no developed classes and there was not much of distinction between the rich and the poor. But its developed stage in Vedic literature does not prove that it functioned as such. The expression "Sabheyā" in the Rgveda means "worthy of sitting in the assembly". The term "Sabhā-saha" in the same Veda denotes "eminent in the assembly". In the Rgveda only persons of noble birth (Sujāta) are mentioned as attending the Sabhā and being worthy of it. In the Rgveda Sabhā also appears to mean a gambling hall.

In the Atharvaveda, Sabhā is mentioned as a

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1Vāyu Purāṇa. 54. 105; 30. 279.
2Rv. II. 24, 13.
3Ibid., X. 71, 10.
4Ibid., VII. 1, 4.
5Ibid., X. 34, 6.
daughter of Prajāpati and Samiti’s sister.¹ In Taittiriya Brāhmaṇa occurs an expression ‘Sabha-Pāla,’² which has been translated by the authors of the Vedic Index,³ to mean ‘guardian of an assembly hall’. Another expression Sabhāpati⁴ occurring in some of the Samhitās means ‘lord of the assembly’. All these expressions relating to the term Sabha create confusion regarding its exact nature and composition. Basing their suppositions on Vedic and later literature, the historians have different views to offer on the Sabha’s nature and composition.

According to Ludwig,⁵ the Sabha was an assembly not of all the people but a select body comprising the Brāhmaṇas and Māghavanās (rich patrons), who possessed high social status. He quotes some passages from the Rgveda to support his theory. One passage refers to votaries of Indra who are rich in horses and chariots

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¹ Av. VII. 12, 1.
³ Macdonell and Keith – Vedic Index. II. p. 428.
⁴ Vāj. Saṁ. XVI. 24; Taitt. Saṁ. IV. 5, 3, 2; Kāṣṭh. Saṁ. XVII. 13, etc.
⁵ Ludwig Trans. of the Rgveda, pp. 253-56 cites Rv. VIII. 4, 9; X. 71, 10; VII. 1, 4, Cf. Vedic Index II. p. 426.
(which was the standard of capital during the Vedic period) and who receive wealth to go to the Sabhā. Another passage refers to the prominence conferred on a member of the Sabhā (Sabhāsad) by Yaśas and still another speaks of an assemblage (not in the context of the Sabhā) of persons of noble birth (Sujātaḥ). According to him, the Sabhā was like an upper house.

Authors of the Vedic Index support Ludwig's theory that the Sabhā was an assembly constituted by the Brāhmaṇas and rich patrons of society. "This view can be supported in the expression 'Sabheya', 'worthy of the assembly' applied to a Brāhmaṇa."¹ Max Müller² interprets the term Sabheya as implication of 'courtly manners'. Macdonell and Keith refute his idea by saying: "This is rather doubtful; as 'courtly manner' is not conspicuous in the Vedic society as in Homeric."³

In Rgveda a Vipra (priest, Brāhmaṇa) is said to be eminent in the assembly. This supports Ludwig's view. The term 'Māghavana' is a regular name for the generous

¹Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. pp. 426-27.
³Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 427 fn.
giver of bounties to the Brāhmaṇas, evidently constituting a rich class. All ancient texts of Indian literature show that wealth belonged to the Vaiśya class and not to the fighting and priestly classes. Ipso facto, the Māghavanās correspond to the Vaiśyas. Their inclusion in and eminent place in the Sabha means that it was not a body of only Brāhmaṇas (who dominated the society of that time) but comprised influential people. This view is supported by Dr. Shamasastry who holds that the Sabha essentially was the people's assembly, not of all but only of the respectable and cultured section.\(^1\) Abinash Chandra Das avers that the "Sabha was originally an assembly of rich, respectable and cultured men of a village or town whose opinion had some value and weight."\(^2\)

Prof. Bloomfield's\(^3\) interpretation that the Sabha was a domestic institution (this view is corroborated by the St. Petersburg Dictionary) is utterly untenable as all the references in Vedic and later literature\(^4\) interpret

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\(^1\)Shamasastry quoted in 'Rgvedic Culture'. p. 327.
\(^2\)Das Abinash Chandra - Rgvedic Culture. p. 327.
\(^3\)J.A.O.S. XIX. p. 13.
\(^4\)Av. VIII. 10, 5 (the sense is clearly assembly). Taitt. Saṁ. III. 4, 8, 6; Taitt. Br. I. 1, 10, 3; Chh. Up. VII. 14. (all denote assembly hall). The authors of Vedic Index point out that the exact sense given by the St. Petersburg Dictionary is 'Society Room' in a dwelling house (Vedic Index II. p. 427 fn.).
it to be an assembly or people in conclave.

Prof. Hillebrandt does not differentiate between the Sabha and the Samiti. According to him, the Sabha was used for the sacrificial purpose. "He saw in Agni "of the hall" (Sabheya) a trace of the fire used in sacrifice on behalf of the assembly when it met." The first part of his theory can be refuted on the basis of an Atharvavedic hymn which clearly refers to the Sabha and the Samiti as twin daughters of Prajāpati. The second part of his theory is refuted by Saletore that every household had a sacrificial altar of its own. But in our view it might have been possible that on special occasions a sacrificial ceremony was observed on behalf of the members of the Sabha.

Prof. Zimmer holds the view that the Sabha was a village council which was presided over by the Grāmaṇī. But he ignores the evidence of Satapatha Brāhmaṇa and


2Cited from Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions. p. 392.

3Av. VII. 13, 1.

4Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions. p. 392.
Chhandogyâ Upaniṣad which describe the king going to attend the Sabha just as he attended the Samiti. This means that since he presided over the meetings of the Samiti, he also headed the meetings of the Sabha. The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa verse also points out that the Sabha was not a simple village assembly but a council of dignitaries. Moreover, Prof. Zimmer could not offer any evidence to prove that the Gramani presided over the meetings of a Sabha.

Refuting Prof. Zimmer’s view that the Gramani presided over the Sabha, Bandyopadhyaya holds that the Sabha was an association of kinsfolk, but later on it became not only an association of kinsfolk but of men bound together by ties of blood or of local contiguity and it was closely associated with the king.3 But Ghoshal pointed out that Bandyopadhyaya forgets to refer to the significance of the epithet Sabhapati occuring in the Yajus texts showing that the connection

1Śat. Br., III. 3, 4, 14; Chh. Up. V. 3, 6. The Śat. Br. comprises thus, “Even his (Soma’s own) kings come (to him) to attend the assembly and he is the first to salute the king, for he is gracious.”


3Śat. Br., II. 5, 14, Chh. Up. V. 3, 6; and VIII. 14, 1.

4Ghoshal – Studies in Indian History and Culture. p. 354.
of the Sabha with the king had become indirect even in the Brāhmaṇa period, while he fails to make allowance for the late date of the Upaniṣad passage."

Dr. Jayaswal¹ describes the Sabha as a "noteworthy constitutional organism in the Vedic age and later". He further states that it was a popular body and propounds the theory that "probably it was a standing and select body of selected men working under the authority of the Samiti... the Sabha had its president. It seems there were elders in the Sabha."

Dr. Ghoshal² refutes Jayaswal's contention by saying that he himself admits that it is merely a hypothesis which is not deducible from the available data. This by itself is enough to disprove his theory. Secondly, how could he attribute sovereignty to the Samiti by saying that the Sabha was working under the authority of the former? He could not advance any evidence from the early literature to establish his hypothesis. There are no data in the Vedic or later literature which could prove the Sabha to be a constitutional body; neither is its popular character mentioned anywhere. On the contrary, he himself states: "Those entitled to a seat therein were invested, so to say, with lusture. They are pointedly

²Ghoshal - Beginnings, p. 148 and Note 12.
alluded to. They were objects of special respect.\textsuperscript{1}

This interpretation is certainly not of a democratic or popular assembly but of an assembly of select members who are looked upon as more respectable than the commoners. That the Sabha was a body comprising elders is also an obscure and baseless statement. Dr. Jayaswal's theory about the nature and composition of the Sabha is therefore not tenable. In the words of Dr. Kane, "the assumptions of Dr. Jayaswal are all conjectural."\textsuperscript{2}

Jayaswal, however, correctly attributed the judicial character to the Sabha.\textsuperscript{3}

Dr. Altekar's\textsuperscript{4} theory in regard to the Sabha's nature is also the result of much speculation and is based on hypothesis. Describing the nature of the Sabha, he contends that it "was primarily the village social Club, but the few items of the simple village government of the age were also transacted there by its members." He concludes by saying that the balance of available evidence,
however, tends to show that "the Sabha was usually the village assembly, meeting for social as well as political purposes."

Saletore¹ suggests that dropping the Gramani from his theory, Altekar merely improves on Zimmer's concept and does not propound anything new. Altekar ascribes royal status to the members of the Sabha, basing his hypothesis on a passage in the Atharvaveda which describes how the Sabhasads of God Yama were royal in status and were entitled to share the 16th part of the merit attributed to him.² On the analogy of this hymn he assumes that possibly members of the Sabha were the king's ministers.

We think, it is, however, not possible to accept Dr. Altekar's view as it is. First, the Sabha in the Vedic and later literature is used in so many senses that it is not possible to attach a precise meaning to it just on the basis of hypothesis which is not corroborated anywhere in the relevant literature. Secondly, even if we agree with him that members of the Sabha were given a share of the titles, it contradicts Altekar's own view. According

¹Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institutions. p. 394.

²Av. III. 19, 1. - यमनानी विज्ञातन्त्र चक्षुसूर्य अरोदय | यनन्त्रमात्रायी संप्राद: ॥
to him, the Sabha was a popular village assembly. Such a reference can be attributed to an assembly of paid bureaucracy and not to a popular body. He goes to the extent of saying that the Sabha was a cabinet, but this too is untenable because the Sabha is nowhere mentioned as a king's assembly in Vedic literature. We may, however, agree with Altekar that primarily the Sabha was a village social club which could transact some public business also.

Hopkins discusses the Sabha's nature in the Epic tradition. He states: "In the Epic we find the Sabha to be an assembly of any sort. It may be a judicial one, a court of law; it may be a royal one, the king's court; it may be a social gathering for pleasure; and finally it may in its older meaning be a political assembly."\(^1\)

Thus, owing to inadequate information available in ancient literature, it is not easy to ascertain the Sabha's exact nature. But on the basis of direct or indirect references we may conclude that the Sabha was a select assembly of Brāhmaṇas and other rich persons who indulged in amusement and social affairs and sometimes also discussed public business while at other times it performed judicial functions also and, in the later period, meant the royal court. This view accords with

\(^1\)J.A.O.S. XIII. 148.
the consensus of a majority of the scholars.

**SAMITI**

Samiti, an expression often mentioned in Vedic literature, sometimes with the Sabha and sometimes separately, denotes almost the same meaning i.e. an assembly. References to the Samiti in the Rgveda are found in the portions which are considered to be the latest. The literal meaning of the term (Sam + iti) is 'meeting together'. Though it does not denote different meanings in different references, like the Sabha, its exact nature and composition are not certain either. There are six references to it in the Rgveda but the Atharvaveda carries plenty of such references.

Following the gradual development of big empires, references to this assembly became infrequent in the later literature. It is seldom mentioned in the Sūtras, while in the Mahābhārata a gathering of princes summoned for Yudhiṣṭhira's Rājasūya is called the Samiti. In the Vāyupurāṇa we come across only one reference to it: Brhati, a daughter of Brhadukha, had three sons, who are styled as "Ornaments of the assembly." Here, too, the assembly's

1Rv. I. 95, 8; IX. 92, 6; X. 97, 6; 166, 4; 191, 3; Av. V. 19, 15; VI. 88, 3; VII. 12, 1; XII. 1, 56; VII. 12, 1; XV. 9, 23; VIII. 10, 5, 6.

2Samiti - Śobhanāḥ; Vāyu Purāṇa. 96. 246-47.
nature is obscure and we are not sure whether we should link it with the Samiti of the Vedic age or not.

Scholars have diverse opinions regarding the nature and composition of the Samiti too.

Ludwig holds the opinion that the Samiti was a more comprehensive conference — composed of all the Viśāḥ plus Brāhmaṇas and Māghavanās too, if they wanted to attend it, the Sabhā being their special assembly. We may agree with him that the Samiti was an assembly of the whole but the second part of his opinion — that membership of the Samiti was optional for Brāhmaṇas and Māghavanās — does not hold good. A curse uttered by a Brāhmaṇa in the Atharvaveda proves the regular membership of the Samiti: "The tears of one weeping (krip), which rolled (down) when he was scathed, these verily, O Brāhmaṇa-scather, did the gods maintain as thy portion of water.

"With what they bathe a dead man, with what they wet (ud) beards, that verily O Brāhmaṇa-scather, did the gods maintain as thy portion of water.

"The rain of Mitra and Varuṇa does not rain upon the Brāhmaṇa-scather; the assembly (Samiti) does not

Trans. of the Rv. III. 253.

Av. IV. 19, 15.
suit him; he wins no friend to his control.**

Hillebrandt's supposition that there was no difference between the Sabha and the Samiti is, of course, untenable in view of the reference in the Atharvaveda which styles the Sabha and the Samiti as two daughters of Prajapati.

Authors of the Vedic Index denote the term Samiti as an assembly of the Vedic tribe. Apte also holds the same view and states that the Samiti in the sense of an "assembly" of the Vedic tribe is mentioned in the Rgveda.

In his "History of Sanskrit Literature", Prof. Macdonell writes that king's power was limited by the will of the people expressed in the tribal assembly (Samiti). As to the constitution and functions of this body, we have, unfortunately, little or no information. We get enough

1 Av. IV. 19, 15.
2 Av. VII. 13.
3 Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 430.
4 V.B.S. Vol. I. The Vedic Age. p. 356.
5 Apte Cites Rv. I. 93, 8; IX. 92, 6 etc. to support his view in The Vedic Age. p. 357.
6 Macdonell - History of Sanskrit Literature. p. 158.
information to prove that the king depended on the Samiti but if the Samiti was a tribal assembly, what character would this learned historian attribute to the Sabha?

Like Ludwig, Zimmer also holds the opinion that the Samiti was composed of Vīśāḥ, in which the king also took part. He holds that the Samiti had the right to elect or re-elect a king. He compared the Samiti with an assembly in ancient Germany, as described by Tacitus in his Germania. Prof. Ghoshal agrees with Zimmer's view. He cites a passage from the Rgveda which, according to him, probably refers to an influential candidate for the throne willing to carry through his will in the teeth of the Samiti. To support his view, Zimmer refers to a passage from the Atharvaveda.

The authors of the Vedic Index refute his idea. They state: "That he (king) was elected there, as Zimmer

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2 In order to avoid repetition, we will sidewise discuss Samiti's concern over election and re-election of the king.


4 Rv. X. 166, 4.

5 Av. III. 4, 2.
thinks, is as uncertain as he was elected at all.¹

They point out that the available data are not sufficient to establish the existence of the system of elective monarchy in the Vedic period.

Jayaswal² writes: "Going back to the oldest literature of the race, we find from the Vedas that national life and activities in the earliest times on record were expressed through popular assemblies and institutions. The greatest institution of this nature was the Samiti of our Vedic forefathers."

He further states: "The Samiti is the national assembly of the whole people or Viśāh;³ for we find the whole people or Samiti in the alternative electing and re-electing the Rājan or king."⁴ The whole people were supposed to be present in the assembly.

In stating that the Samiti had the right to elect or re-elect the king, Jayaswal merely repeats Prof. Zimmer's theory, which was refuted by the authors of

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¹Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 430.
³Ibid. He describes Viśāh (विशाह) as the people or tribe. p. 16 fn.
⁴Rv. X. 173, 1; Av. VI. 87, 1. - विशाहम् किया बानति द: Av. VI. 88, 3. - विशाहः ते समिति: राज्यातिपात: Av. III. 4, 2. Also Av. III. 343. - त्यां विशाह बृहत्तां राज्य
the Vedic Index. He does not even show the courtesy of mentioning them in connection with his theory. We have already stated that the idea of elective monarchy in the Vedic age is vague, due to the non-availability of sufficient data.

Jayaswal states that the Samiti was the greatest institution (of a popular nature) and was constitutionally a sovereign body. But he could not offer any evidence to establish his theory. It is in fact doubtful whether the idea of constitution and sovereignty at all existed in the Vedic period. A hymn from the Atharvaveda describes the Sabha and the Samiti as the two daughters of Prajapati and there are references in the Satapatha Brahmana and TaittirIya Brâhmaṇa which describe the king drawing his power from the God Prajapati. These two hymns, in our opinion, provide clear evidence about the same origin of all these institutions. If the idea of divine origin of kingship was prevalent in those days, the passage mentioned above also attributes the same status to both the assemblies. So we think that it is not safe to accord the sovereign status to any one of these institutions.

Av. VII. 12.
On the analogy of Chhāndogya Upaniṣad, which describes Śvetaketu, a young man of great learning, going to the Samiti of Pāñcchāla, Jayaswal tried to establish another view that the Samiti was a national academy. But his own statement — "presenting himself before the Samiti, also called the Pariṣad of Pāñcchāla" — contradicts his supposition that the Samiti was a national academy. On the contrary, this statement suggests that the Samiti was a royal assembly. On the one hand he says that the whole people were supposed to be present in the assembly, and on the other, referring to the Samiti of Pāñcchāla, he states: "It would be hardly probable that the whole nation, without any principle of representation, would be actually present". He puts forward three opinions regarding the membership of the Samiti, but has not advocated any one of them strongly.

With slight variations in Dr. Jayaswal's theory, Dr. Altekar puts forward his idea about the nature and composition of the Samiti. He also based his supposition

1 Chh. Up., VI. 1.
   सूप्तिसमयम् यो कनानि परिषद्यायम्
3 Jayaswal - Hindu Polity. p. 15.
4 Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. pp. 139-46.
on a Rgvedic\textsuperscript{1} hymn, as did Jayaswal, without caring to mention that he was forestalled in propounding this theory by some earlier historian. He thinks that though this hymn refers to a republican State, it can well be presumed that the Samitis were the same in monarchical States also. But he himself refutes this by saying that "the hymn by itself cannot conclusively prove the existence of a republican State."

On the concept of the Samiti as a popular sovereign body, he differs from Jayaswal. He holds that the sovereign power was not vested in the populace in general but in the aristocratic leaders of the cantons which were few in number. In another context he asserts that the "villages had their own popular assemblies known as Sabhās and the capital had the central assembly for the whole State, which was called the Samiti".

Altekar also advocates the theory of the king's election in the Samiti. This idea has already been set aside as no reliable data are available to support it.

Altekar regrets that the literary information available about the Samiti is not sufficient to guide us regarding the constitution of the Samiti. He concludes "however the central assemblies of republican States were aristocratic bodies, it may be permissible to suggest

\textsuperscript{1}Rv. X. 191, 3.
that the same was probably the case with Samitis functioning under the monarchies.¹

Prof. Ghoshal partially accepts Zimmer's view that the Samiti was composed of all the subjects who had the right to elect or re-elect the king, and he also partially holds the generally accepted view that the Samiti was the popular assembly of the Vedic people and was an important asset to the king. He bases his opinion on a long curse² uttered by a Brāhmaṇa that the Samiti does not agree with a king who harasses a Brāhmaṇa.

Though Ghoshal's theory is not altogether untenable, the base of his supposition is weak since the same hymn has been used by many historians for the same purpose but they are not unanimous even on the translation. The authors of the Vedic Index do not find any constitutional or political importance of the Samiti in this passage. Kane also noticed this passage but did not allude to the Samiti's constitutional or political power.³

Majumdar holds that in the light of the available data we may conclude that the "assembly" was originally the assembly of the people at large (Viś) and they retained

¹Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. pp. 139-44.
²Av. V. 19.
their influence over it.\(^1\)

The above discussion shows that the Samiti was a popular assembly of the Vedic period, but its constitution is enveloped in darkness. Who composed the Samiti? What was its exact nature? Was its membership elective? Were there any set rules for its proper working? These are some questions which cannot be answered precisely because of the indirect and inadequate evidence found in ancient literature.

**Women and Sabha and Samiti**

Now the question arises whether women attended the meetings of the Sabha and the Samiti? Did they take an active part in their proceedings? There is a reference to a woman described as *Sabhāvatī* in the Rgveda,\(^2\) meaning thereby 'worthy of the assembly'. A reference in the Atharvaveda\(^3\) also points to women's presence in the Samiti, but it is not as clear as that in the Rgveda. Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā\(^4\) informs us that women did not attend the assembly. In the light of these references, it is not clear whether women were members of these assemblies or whether they

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1. Majumdar - Corporate Life in Ancient India. p. 114.
3. Av. VIII. 10, 5.
were altogether excluded from their meetings. The Upaniṣads have references to their attending the assembly of learned men. We may conclude from this that they seldom attended the Sabha and the Samiti and that their presence was not as regular as that of men-folk because they did not take part in political activities. In the later period women did not at all attend the Sabha, as is evident from the Draupadi episode in the Epic.

Deliberations of Sabha and Samiti

The authors of the Vedic Index¹ state: "The hall (Sabha) was clearly used for dicing, presumably when the assembly was not transacting public business". This sentence broadly describes the Sabha’s functions in the Vedic period. There is ample evidence in the Rgveda² and later literature³ to show that the Sabha was used for dicing. Persons who were addicted to dicing visited the Sabha regularly. The term Sabha-sthāṇu, meaning 'pillar of the assembly' is interpreted by some scholars as a dicer because of his constant presence there.

¹Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 426.
²Rv. X. 34, 6; Av. V. 31, 6; XII. 3, 46 (here Dyūta is used in place of Sabha).
Dicing was such a regular part of the Sabha that a passage occurring in Āpastamba Dharma Sūtra bars students and graduates from visiting such a Sabha.¹

As far as the transaction of public business in the Sabha is concerned, plenty of direct data are available from the Rgveda and later literature. That conflict and discord at the Sabha’s meetings was dreaded is clear from the following hymn which occurs in the Rgveda:²

"Assemble speak together; let your minds be all of one accord.

"The place is common, common the assembly, common

the mind, so be their thoughts united.

"One and the same be your resolve, and be your

mind of one accord.

"United be the thoughts of all that may happily

agree."

That discord was disliked in the Sabha is also proved by an earlier Atharvavedic hymn³ which runs as follows:

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¹Ap. Dh. S. I. 1, 3, 12.
³Av. VII. 13.
"We know thy name, O assembly: Nariṣṭā verily is thy name. May all those that sit assembled in thee utter speech in harmony with me."

The word Nariṣṭāh is differently explained by the historians. Bloomfield interprets it as mirth, and Whitney, Lanman and Griffith as sport. Mookerji describes it as follows: "Decision by the vote of the majority was known, as is indicated by the term Nariṣṭā applied to the Sabha in the Atharvaveda." But Śaṅkara's view is generally accepted by the scholars, who interpret it 'as inviolable' (resolution of many that cannot be overridden).³

The deliberative functions of the Sabha are corroborated by allied terms like 'Sabha-saha' meaning 'eminent in the assembly'. This eminence was surely not due to ability in playing dice but due to the person's ability to impress others in the debate. That the Sabha

The above translation is from the S.B.E. Vol. XIII. p. 138. Max Miller on the Atharvaveda. Except the word Nariṣṭā, it is Śaṅkara's interpretation.

1 Ghoshal - Beginnings, p. 150.


3 नरिष्ट, व्यक्तिता परीतिनिमित्तात् - ततो समुपय स्थेयः। वाक्यं वेदाग्रहं न परीतिनिमित्तात् कत: कन्याकुमारः त्यतिपूर्वः नरिष्टेति नाम।
transacted public business is also supported by such terms as Sabhā-pati, "lord of the assembly" (perhaps president or speaker) and Sabhā-pāla, "guardian of the assembly". A speaker's desire to be prominent in the Sabhā by his speech finds reference in certain Grhyasūtras. Pārskara Grhya Sūtra narrates a mantra for those who wanted to win in the debate in the Sabhā and the Samiti.

What sort of deliberations took part in the Sabhā is a question the answer to which is not deducible from the available data. Perhaps it decided matters relating to economic affairs, i.e., it discussed cows and cattle which were the main source of livelihood. The following hymn from the Rgveda may be advanced to support this view:

"O ye cows ... loudly is your excellence talked about in the Sabhā and an expert in them was an object of great desire;

"Soma gives him, who offers him oblations ... a son skilful in the affairs of house (Sadnya), Sabhā (Sabheya) and sacrifice (vidathya)."

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1 Hari G.S. I. 15, 4 and Bhar. G.S. II. 26; 59, 8.
2 Pārs. G.S. III. 13, 3.
The term Sabha_sad found in the Atharvaveda¹ and later literature,² interpreted as assessors, points to the judicial duties of the Sabha. The authors of the Vedic Index³ describe Sabha-sad as: "Sitter in the assembly", which probably is a technical description of the assessors who decided legal cases. Sabhācara, still another term from Vedic literature,⁴ is interpreted by Macdonell and Keith to signify 'one who is dedicated to Dharma' i.e. Justice, they state: "It is difficult not to see in him a member of the Sabha as a law court, perhaps as one of those who sit to decide cases."⁵

A passage in the Rgveda refers to a man returning from the Sabha in joy on having been acquitted of blame to show its judicial character: 'Kilviṣasprit',⁶ means "that which removes the stain attaching to a person by means of accusation".

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¹Av. III. 29, 1; VII. 12, 2; XIX. 55, 6.
³Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 428.
⁵Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 428.
⁶Rv. X. 71, 10.
In the Pāraskar Grhya Sūtra, the Sabha is named as Nādi and Twiṣi, meaning sounding and shining respectively. According to Mookerji, "the sound is due to proclamation of justice (dharma-nirupana) and blaze to the fire which is kept in the court house for the purpose of ordeals." While Jayaswal interprets them as 'trouble' and 'vehemence'. Kāṭhaka Samhitā records a long discussion over a case where a child is accidentally run over and killed by a chariot which was driven by the king and the Purohita. It records that the case was reported to the Sabha of Ikshvākus, which gave the judgement.

The Sabha continued to work as a judicial institution even in the later period, but was changed into a royal law-court.

Now the question arises who formed the judicial body of the Sabha? Was the whole assembly expected to deliver judgements? The authors of the Vedic Index state that the term Sabha-sad may be taken to mean the heads of families who attended the Sabha more often than ordinary people and decided legal cases there.

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3 Kāṭh. Sam. XXVII. 41.
The references show that religious activities were also performed by the Sabha. It was also associated with the practice of witchcraft.

Were there any rules of debate? To answer this question we may refer to a hymn in the Vājasnevyī Samhitā which shows a man repenting for his sins committed in the Sabha. Though no reference to the set rules of debate in the Sabha is found, the hymn clearly shows that people were fully conscious of their behaviour and language in the Sabha.

On the evidence of available information, the scholars have attributed different kinds of functions to the Samiti: that it was a deliberative body; discussing the political, military and executive affairs of society and taking part in the king’s election and re-election. Some went to the extent of proving it to be a national academy while others held that it had control over public land also. We shall now discuss this issue and see whether

1 Vāj. Sa. XX. 17. - यदृष्टां यदार्जे ग्यत्रायं यत्रिन्मित्रे यथार्थे यदृष्टां यदेनन्वयस्मात्यं यदेवर्षोऽध्येत्त्रं तस्यावस्यासाधि

2 The Samiti’s concern with the election and re-election of the king has been discussed above.

3 Jayaswal’s conjecture which is not tenable, is also discussed in connection with the Samiti’s nature.
the Samiti really transacted all this business at its meetings and wielded so much power.

Like the members of the Sabha, members of the Samiti were anxious to win the debate at the meetings. Like the members of the Sabha, members of the Samiti were anxious to win the debate at the meetings.1

Discord was disliked here too.2

"We bend together your minds, together your courses, together your designs; ye yonder who are of discordant courses, we make you bend (them) together here (1).

"I seize (your) mind with (my) mind; come after my intent with (your) intents; I put your hearts in my control; come with (your) tracks following my motion (2).

"Worked in for me (are) heaven and earth; worked in (is) divine Sarswati; worked in for me (are) both Indra and Agni; may be successful here, O Sarswati" (3).

The above passages depict a high degree of debate in the Samiti, which shows no parallel in the literature of any other part of the ancient world. The speakers uttering these passages really longed for intelligence and eminence in the assembly. They really wished to overpower the minds of others with their good speech. It is also clear from the passages referred to above that

1Av. VII. 13. समाच त्यति समालितबकतथ प्रस्तावतितसि सं सिद्धान्तं।
वैना संस्कृतु उप मातासं शिलाक्राम विद्यानि हतितर।
सं संितहू।।

the Vedic people keenly wanted uplift in their public life, since they pray for their common interests. Appreciating the deliberative system of the Vedic assemblies, Majumdar holds: 

"Though the people were keenly alive to the necessity of gaining over the assembly, the only means by which they were sought to directly achieve this end was indeed the most honourable one, viz., the persuasion of its members by supremacy in debate."

We may call it a neat approach to the ways of life of Vedic Indians.

The Samiti, like the Sabha, also performed religious functions. The technical meaning of the Samiti "Order of battle", indicates the military functions performed by the Samiti. A reference to this occurs in the Rgveda and Vājasneyī Samhitā, which describes a doctor (Bhiṣak, who is a Vipra) in whom medicinal herbs come together as nobles in the Samiti.

What did they deliberate on, in the assemblies? This, again, is a question the answer to which lies in obscurity. The authors of the Vedic Index rightly put

\[\text{Majumdar - Corporate Life in Ancient India. p. 117.}\]

\[\text{Rv. X. 97, 6; Vāj. Saṃ. XII. 80. cited in Kane's H.D.S. Vol. III. p. 92. Where he describes the Samiti as meeting or battle.}\]

\[\text{Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. p. 431.}\]
"It is reasonable to assume that the business of the assembly was general deliberation on policy of all kinds, legislation so far as the Vedic Indians cared to legislate, and judicial work*. There are clear references showing that the Sabha held authority over the judiciary, but there is no reference to prove that the Samiti did not itself hold judicial powers.

Prof. Ghoshal tried to attribute to the Samiti a right on public land and its distribution. To support his point he quotes a sentence occurring in a hymn in the Šatapatha Brāhmaṇa thus* *"To whomsoever the Kṣatriya with the approval of the Viś grants a settlement, that is properly given*. Earlier in his 'Agrarian System in Ancient India' he stated: *This passage evidently refers to public land of the folk or the State and it seems to mean that while the king's gift of such land with the

1Ghosal - Beginnings, p. 149.

2Sat. Br. VII. 1, 1, 4. Cited in Ghoshal. p. 149.

Ghosal informs us that the passages' translation is that of Eggling. While Saleatore cites it as "the fathers have prepared this place for him; for Yama is the Kṣatra (nobility or ruling power) and the fathers (deceased ancestors) are the clansmen; and to whomsoever the Chief (Kṣatriya) with the approach of the clan, grants a settlement that (settlement) is properly given; and in like manner does Yama, the ruling power with the consent of the fathers, the clan now grant to this (sacrifice) a settlement on this earth" (Eggling’s translation).
consent of the people was in accordance with the tribal or customary law, it was sometimes arbitrarily disposed of by the sole authority of the ruler.*

Saletore derives the following conclusions from Prof. Ghoshal's argument: (1) that the public land belonged to the subjects; (2) the king gave gifts of land according to the tribal law; (3) sometimes he could arbitrarily dispose of a part of the land. He also points out that the assembly had control over the distribution of the land.

Saletore's idea i.e. the assembly's control over the distribution of the land, may also be refuted. (The Samiti was evidently composed of the Vīśaḥ (subjects) who are recognised as the third class in order, among the Aryans, the first and second classes being the Brāhmaṇas and the Kṣatriyas. Giving the assembly superiority over the king means establishing a new idea that the Vaiśyas were superior to the Kṣatriyas, which is utterly untenable. It is safer to agree with the authors of the Vedic Index that it cannot be concluded whether the land belonged to the king or to the public. This point is discussed in detail in the chapter II.

**Importance of Assemblies to King**

That the king attended the Sabha and the Samiti

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1Saletore - Ancient Indian Political Thought and Institution. p. 403.
is quite clear from the following references taken from Vedic literature. Rgvedic references bear testimony to the king's presence in the assembly. *Like a true king going to attend the Samiti* may be taken to mean that it was binding on the king to attend the Samiti.

In Atharvaveda also we find many references to the king's presence in the Samiti: *As a Hotar proceeds to the house which possesses sacrificial animals; as a just king proceeds to the assembly, so the purified Soma enters into the pitcher and remains there as a buffalo in the forest.*

*He moves out towards the tribe. After him moved out both the assembly and the gathering and the army and the strong drink.*

The following passage of Kausitaki refers to a king going to an assembly:

*I am overpowering, superior by name on the earth; I am subduing all overpowering vanquishing in every region.*

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1 Rv. X. 97, 6; यद्वृति अधिकतम समपत राजान्: अभिताकित
Rv. IX. 92, 6; राजा न सत्यः तत्तितः रियानर्य:

2 Av. XV. 9; (Vrṣṭya Sūkta) Whitney's Trans. p. 783.

3 Av. XII. 1; Kaus. 38. 30 W. Av. p. 670.
A prayer repenting over the sins committed in the assembly in the Vājasneyī Samhitā, according to Ghoshal, may point to the presence of a royal couple in the Sabhā who made this appeal.

Chhāndogya Upanisad, one of the latest works of Vedic literature, bears testimony to the king's presence in the Samiti of Pañchālas.

The position of the Sabhā and the Samiti was so important that a king without the assembly was not even thought of. Kings always tried to be in the good books of these assemblies as their support was highly valued for the ruler and the prosperity of the nation. The following verse in the celebrated hymn to the Earth by Kauśitaki indicates their importance to the king:

"What villages, what forest, what assemblies (are) upon the earth (bhūmi), what hosts gatherings - in them may speak what is pleasant to thee."  

That angry attitude of the assembly was dreaded by the kings is proved by a hymn where a king prays for

\[1\] Vāj. Sam. XX. 17, Keith's Trans. cited by Ghoshal in Beginnings, p. 152. note (25).

\[2\] Chh. Up. VI. 1.

\[3\] Av. VII. 13.
the support of the Sabha and the Samiti in the Atharvaveda. The words "the Samiti does not suit him who harasses a Brahmāṇa"¹ point out that the kings really were aware of the importance of the assemblies’ help and support. That the Sabha and the Samiti were not effete bodies is proved by a hymn in the Rgveda uttered probably by an unsuccessful candidate who wants to usurp the throne by winning over the Samiti.² That an agreement between the king and the assembly was deemed necessary in order to establish him firmly on his throne is clear from a hymn in the Atharvaveda:

"Fixed unmoved, do thou slaughters the foes, make them that play the foe fall below (thee); (be) all the quarters (diś) like-minded, concordant (SadhryaRch); let the gathering (Samiti) here suit thee (who art) fixed."³

**Relationship Between Sabha and Samiti**

What was the exact relationship between the Sabha and the Samiti? Were these separate institutions, independent of each other? or were these two names of one assembly? These are some intricate questions. A

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¹ Av. V. 19.
² Rv. X. 166, 4.
³ Av. VI. 88; Whitney’s Trans. p. 346.
distinction between these two bodies cannot be made with precision as their constitution, nature and working are all enveloped in obscurity. Still on Atharvavedic evidence it can well be inferred that these two were separate organisations standing on the same footing as this verse describes them as twin daughters of God Prajāpati. Several times they are referred to separately in Vedic literature, though sometimes they are referred to together also. References to their work also make us believe that these two were different bodies; the Sabha worked as a judicial court while the Samiti did not. On the other hand, the Samiti was connected with State warfare. The presence of the king in both and the religious functions performed in them show signs of similarity.

The available data are not sufficient to prove that the Sabha and the Samiti were independent of each other. We may record here the opinions of some learned scholars. Chadwick holds that there is some evidence to indicate that the council and assembly were not very clearly distinguished; probably the only difference was that the Sabha performed judicial functions which the Samiti did not." Hillebrandt, as recorded above, does

1 Av. VII. 13.

2 Chadwick - The Heroic Age. p. 384.
not see any difference between these two popular institutions. According to Zimmer, Altekar and Majumdar, the Sabha was a village assembly and the Samiti was a central assembly at the capital. The generally accepted view is that of Ludwig, according to whom the Sabha was a select body of Brāhmaṇas and rich patrons, while the Samiti was a popular assembly. Jayaswal also thinks on the same lines; according to him, the Samiti was a popular assembly and the Sabha too, but the latter was a standing and stationary body. To this we may add that these two might have originated as a single popular assembly which, with the passage of time, was given two names and became different popular assemblies. Gradually, the Sabha tended to become an aristocratic body (being the assembly of the select), while the Samiti retained the popular character, with the increase in the kingly powers silently passing out of existence.

Antiquity of Sabha and Samiti

The antiquity of the Sabha was first pointed out by Hopkins who compared it with the German Sippe.\(^1\) It has been maintained that the word Sabha (cf. Indo-European S(u)echo) is derived from a root closely associated with the old European Sub(b), old high German

\(^1\) J.A.O.R.S. XIII. p. 148.
Sipp(e)a, Gothic Sibja and mid-German Sippe — all meaning an association of a kin, tribe or a clan. Hopkins' suggestions indicate the tribal character of the Sabha in the Vedic period. The same is the opinion of Bandyopadhyaya who thinks that perhaps the early Sabhās in India were of the same type. The inclusion of women members and the nature of the Sabha's working, which cannot be precisely named either political, religious, social or judicial, also point to its tribal character. The idea about the ownership of land — whether it belonged to the king or to the subjects — leads us to believe that during the Vedic period these assemblies were of a primitive character.

We may not be able to refute these contentions according to which the Sabha and the Samiti were tribal assemblies, but we may advance the following arguments to show that they were not tribal assemblies during the period under study.

(1) References to these assemblies in Vedic literature are found in the portions which are considered to be the latest. (2) There are very few references showing women-folk attending the assemblies; and later in Maitrāyaṇi Samhitā they were not expected to attend

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1Bandyopadhyaya — Development of Hindu Political Theories. p. 110.

2Mait. Sam. IV. 7, 4.
the Sabha and the Samiti. (3) The name Sabha, which meant 'a body of men shining together', itself refutes the charge that it was a primitive assembly. Men who were 'shining' must be 'men of distinction'. Moreover, the relevant passages in Vedic literature clearly attribute to them a high social status. (4) Vedic people had a high sense of politics. They discussed all kinds of policies in the assemblies and the speakers wished to be victorious in the debates. Their prayer for harmony and prosperity of the nation, to which there is no parallel reference in the world's early history or later literature, also contradicts the view that these assemblies were of a primitive nature. Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa speaks of Soma as the overlord holding a meeting which was attended by the under-kings.\(^1\) Śvetaketu's visit to the Pañchāla Samiti recorded in the Chhāndogya Upaniṣad\(^2\) depicts a high degree of learning, which is never a feature of primitive society. (5) The fact that Vedic people did not distinguish between political and religious matters also does not go against them. Perhaps they attached far more importance to policies concerning their daily life that they linked them with religion.

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\(^1\)Sat. Br. III. 3, 2, 8.

\(^2\)Chh. Up. VI. 1.
There was one more institution in the Vedic period called 'Vidatha' which also corresponds to an assembly. This term occurs 122 times in the Rgveda, 22 times in the Atharvaveda, and Vajasaneyi Samhita refers to it 10 times. In the Brāhmaṇas there are 21 references to Vidatha, while there is only one mention of it in the TāittiRiya Āraṇyaka.† Despite the fact that there are very few references to the Sabha and the Samiti in Vedic literature, they were a greater attraction to scholars of Vedic studies than Vidatha which was certainly a more important body but was almost ignored by them. 'The Vedic Age', which is one of the most comprehensive works on the Vedic period, does not even refer to it. In spite of such a large number of references in Vedic literature, the nature, composition and functioning of the Vidatha, as in the cases of the Sabha and the Samiti is enveloped in obscurity.

†Sharma - Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 78.

‡Only the important Institution could have been mentioned that many times.

³V.B.S. Vol. I. The Vedic Age, Ed. by R.C. Majumdar.
Scholars hold different opinions regarding the nature of the Ṛdatha due to the varying application of the term in different passages of Rgveda and later literature. Prof. Bloomfield strongly maintained that the term Ṛdatha certainly means a 'house' (from 'Vid' aquire) and then sacrifice. According to the authors of Vedic Index, "Vidatha is a word of obscure sense confined mainly to the Rgveda". But they seem to be in agreement with Bloomfield when they state: "This (Bloomfield's) interpretation at any rate appears to suit all the passages. The term Vidathya, once applied to the king (Samrāt), might seem to be against this view, but it may refer to his being 'rich in homesteads' and the connection of women with Vidatha as opposed to the Sabhā tells in favour of Bloomfield's explanation."

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1 J.A.O.S. XIX. p. 21.

2 Macdonell and Keith - Vedic Index. II. pp. 296-97.

3 Rv. IV. 27, 2. In. I. 91.20; 167, 3; Av. XX. 128, 1. Vidathya meaning "having an establishment" is taken to be adequate to show it as a house, according to the authors of Vedic Index. Ibid., II. p. 296.

4 Av. VII. 38, 4; Mait. Sam. IV. 7, 4, cited in Vedic Index. II. p. 297. fn.
But Bloomfield's theory that Vidatha corresponds to a house is criticised by Saletore who states that a house in Vedic literature was called by the following names: Agara, Avasathā, Gaya, Griha, Duronā, Dhāni (in Dhāna-dhāni, treasure-house), Nivesena, Ptināmsadas (women's quarters) Pāṣyā, Parāsad (palace) Sāla and Harmya. The view that women's presence proves it to be a house too is untenable as a passage occurring in the Rūgveda expresses a desire in the marriage ceremony that the bride may not only prove to be a housewife but having control she may speak to Vidatha (council). Again, it is stated that she may speak to Vidatha in her advanced age. So Bloomfield's theory, supported by Macdonell and Keith, that Vidatha certainly meant a house is not acceptable.

According to Whitney, Vidatha was a council.
Zimmer holds that Vidatha essentially was connected with "an assembly". He tends to emphasize that it meant a smaller assembly than the Sabha. Ludwig holds that it was an assembly of Brāhmaṇas and Māghavanas. He further maintains that the term also meant an asylum, like the house of a Brāhmaṇa. We agree with Prof. Ludwig that Vidatha was an assembly, but if we accept his view that Vidhatha was an assembly of Brāhmaṇas and Māghavanas the question arises: Who composed the Sabha? Ludwig believes that the Sabha was a body comprising Brāhmaṇas and Māghavanas. Was it his contention that, being a smaller assembly than the Sabha, it was an assembly of top aristocrats?

Geldner holds that the expression primarily means "knowledge", "priestly lore", "sacrifice", "spiritual authority" and "wisdom". Oldenburg, laying emphasis on the word vi-dha, which he thinks is the root of Vidatha, thinks that originally the term means "act of disposing of some business, distribution and ordinance." Oldenburg's

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1 Cf. Zimmer - Altindoehes Leben 'Vidatha-su Prāṣastāḥ' Rv. II. 27, 12. Macdonell and Keith do not believe that there were smaller assemblies at that primitive age - Vedic Index. II. p. 297.

2 Ludwig's Trans. of Rv. III. 259.

3 Cited from Vedic Index. II. p. 296.

theory may hold good while describing the functions of Vidhatha. The first meaning—'act of disposing of any business'—appears in well-known passages such as "May we the valiant men mightily raise our voice at the determining (of ordinance)." R.S. Sharma points out that there is some sense in the passage as Mitra and Waruṇa, who are described as directing the thoughts of three assemblies in the sky, in the air and on earth, and are described as strengthening the law. At another place, Agni which comes to Vidhatha, is described as an ordainer.

According to Prof. Roth, the sense is primarily 'order'; then the concrete body which gives orders is the 'assembly' for secular or religious ends or for war. It is clear from the references to Vidhatha in Vedic literature that it had all these senses. 

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1 S.B.E. Vol. XLVI. p. 26; Rv. VII. 66, 10; Rv. III. 14, 1. quoted in Sharma—Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 82.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Rv. I. 31, 6; 117, 25; III. 1, 18; 27, 7; IV. 38, 4; VI. 8, 1; X. 35, 26; 92, 2; Av. IV. 20, 1; V. 20, 12; XVIII. 3, 70 etc.

5 Rv. II. 1, 4, 27, 12, 17; III. 33, 5, 6; V. 63, 2; VII. 66, 10; VIII. 39, 1; X. 12, 7; Av. XVII. 1, 15.

6 Rv. I. 50, 1; II. 4, 8; 39, 1; III. 1, 1; 56, 8 etc.

7 Rv. I. 166, 2; 167, 6; V. 59, 2, etc.
Viśvāmitra, who was a Rājnya of Bharate and Kausika families, acted as a priest of King Śudās and a Hotṛ priest at a sacrifice held by Hariścandra. Devāpi, who is represented as the elder brother of King Santanu by Yāsaka, acted as a priest and chief of war, lends support to Roth's interpretation that it was an assembly for religious and war purposes. Supporting Roth's theory, R.S. Sharma holds that "... perhaps a proper course will be to fall in line with Roth, who seems to make a synthesis of various views and concludes that the Vidatha was an assembly meant for secular, religious and military purposes."

Jayaswal created further confusion by ascribing to Vidatha the status of a parent folk assembly and asserting later that religious functions were performed.

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1 Rv. III. 53, 11.
2 Rv. III. 53, 11.
3 Ait. Br. VIII. 16.
4 Nirukta, II. 10.
5 Rv. X. 98, 7.
6 Sharma - Aspects of Political Thought and Institutions in Ancient India. p. 79.
7 Jayaswal - Hindu Polity. p. 20.
there. Ghoshal, criticising Jayaswal, states that the latter seems to be following Prof. Roth and is silent about the other meanings of the term. Ghoshal\(^1\) holds that "in view of these differences of opinion, it seems impossible to predicate any definite attributes to the Vedic Vidatha. Altekar's\(^2\) supposition that Vidatha (derived from the root \(\text{Vid}\), meaning 'to know') probably indicated a religious or sacrificial gathering is merely a repetition of the views propounded by earlier historians.

We may agree with Roth as far as the interpretation of this term is concerned because he hardly leaves any aspect of Vedic life out of its range.

As for the functions of Vidatha, we may state that due to the divergence in the application of the word in various references, it is not easy to state precisely what work was done there. But the available data indicates that Vidatha's transactions comprised religious, political and military functions since, as stated earlier, Vedic people did not differentiate among the various aspects of life.

Was there any relation between Vidatha and the other two assemblies i.e. the Sabha and the Samiti? There is no clear evidence to establish their relationship,

\(^1\)Ghoshal - Beginnings. p. 153.

\(^2\)Altekar - State and Government in Ancient India. p. 141.
but the numerous references to Vidatha in comparison to the Sabha and the Samiti in the Rgveda and Atharvaveda prove that it was a more important body than the other two. But the fact that in the later Vedic literature, Vidatha is seldom mentioned while the Sabha and the Samiti are frequently referred to, shows that it gradually died out while the other two became essential parts of the body politic during those days.

The characteristic feature which prove that Vidatha was a more important and popular body was the presence of women there. At least seven references\(^1\) in Rgveda and Atharvaveda show not only women's attendance at its meetings but also their active part in the deliberations. That women were not mute participants in Vidatha is further proved by a reference to Sūryā who, according to Rgveda, is instructed to speak there.\(^2\) We may repeat that in Rgveda and Atharvaveda\(^3\) a woman is expected not only to be a good housewife but also to speak in Vidatha. There is testimony in Rgveda to show that grown-up men installed a strong and social maiden for the sake of a good Vidatha.\(^4\)

\(^1\) Women's presence in the Sabha and the Samiti is clearly mentioned only once in Rgveda and vaguely in Atharvaveda.

\(^2\) Rv. X. 85, 26.

\(^3\) Rv. X. 85, 26, 27; Av. XIV. 1, 20.

\(^4\) Rv. I. 167, 6. - Installing of a strong and social maiden may point to a Gāgikā (courtesan) which goes to show that the need for social amusements was also felt.