

The Meaning of *Âramaiti*

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*Âramaiti*¹ occurs a total of 40 times in the Gathas and three times in the Haptanghaiti (a work which is the subtle and sublime supplement next in importance to the Gathas). While some modern scholars equate it with the Sanskrit *aramati* ‘readiness to serve, obedience, devotion’, from *aram* ‘readily’, there are some who accept the Pahlavi translation on linguistic basis, to mean *ara* ‘right’ + *maiti* ‘thinking’ and render it as ‘perfect-mindedness, noble-mindedness’. Incidentally, the RigVeda has another *aramati* meaning ‘without repose’ (a prefix of negation + *ramati* ‘repose’ see below). No one has gone for this.

Whatever the case, the lengthened *â* makes one have a second thought. Zarathushtra is quite ‘normal’ in pronouncing the word *arem* ‘rightly, correctly’ with a short *a* when he speaks about “being rightly accompanied by *Âramaiti*” (Song 8:10; Y 43:10), “correctly understanding the facts of life” (9:8; 44:8), and “correctly acknowledging (*arem manyâtâ*) Ahura Mazda and denying (*tare-mâñstâ*) false gods and their followers, who in their turn deny (*tare-manyantâ*) Mazda” (10:1; 45:11). Why should he lengthen the initial vowel to have *âramaiti* then? Any reason for this so-to-say abnormality?!

One can understand that Zarathushtra is a Master Poet, and his Sublime Songs are an unmatched masterpiece of Indo-Iranian poetry. But Zarathushtra is not here to show us his mastery of language. He has turned to poetry only with one aim: Popularize and eternalize his *Mâñthra*-s, the thought-provoking Message in a non-adulterated form. And he has fully succeeded in his aim. Therefore, poetry is secondary. His first and foremost aim and objective is to deliver the Divine Message to “all the living”. And to deliver it, he has to be clear in his words. He simply cannot play with them and leave us puzzled as to what he means to convey. A person is only puzzled when he/she cannot fully grasp what Zarathushtra conveys in a stanza, a song or the entire Gathas. The Gathas are guiding. One only falls short because one has to rely on a translation that puzzles him/her.

Philologically the lengthened *â* warrants that it should be derived from a stem with an initial *â*. There is a stem *ram-* ‘to be at rest, to be stable, to be at peace’. It yields several words, with and without the prefix *â*, in Avesta and Sanskrit, all showing tranquility, stability, serenity, quietness, peace, and pleasure. If so, then *Âramaiti* is made of *â+ram+aiti* (suffix of action) instead of the Vedic *aram* (‘correctly, readily’) + *ati* (suffix of action) with a secondary meaning ‘state of readiness to serve, obedience, devotion’ and the Pahlavi *bovandak menishnîh* ‘right-mindedness’, based on the Avestan *ara* (‘correctly, rightly’)+ *mati* (thinking from *man* ‘to think’). *Âramaiti* should mean ‘tranquility, stability, peace, and serenity’.

A scanning of the Gathas shows that in spite of the terms like *râman* ‘peace’ (2.10; 29.10); *hujiti* ‘good living’ (6.10; 33.10), *hujyâiti* ‘good life’ (5.5, 13.8; 32.5, 48.8)); and *hushiti/husheiti* ‘good dwelling’ (2.10, 3.10, 13.11; 29.10, 30.10, 48.11); there is a vacuum for a major abstract

¹ Av. *âramaiti* is a syllable short in the Gathas due to metrical considerations. Hence, due to its similarity with Sanskrit *arâmati*, it is taken as a shortening of Gathic /*aramati*/ with the lengthening of the initial vowel. Both are usually taken from root *ar-* ‘to fix, set it place’ and *man-* ‘to think’ with *-ti* feminine abstract suffix. – CG, via conversation with Prof Schwartz

for peace and stability, the KEY to a blissful living under the Gathic “Primal Principles of Life” (*dâtâo angheush pouruyehyâ*). They are progressive mentality (*spenta mainyu*), good mind (*vohu manah*), best righteousness (*asha vahishta*), divine communion (*seraosha*), the choice of good dominion (*vohu khshathra vairyâ*), and more than a dozen other principles.

The only missing link is STABILITY and SERENITY to give a person/community—wise and progressive, precise in actions in a choice of good government and enjoying communion with God—the ultimate goal: wholeness (*haurvatât*) and immortality (*amertât*). And ÂRAMAITI stands high among the principles to give one the peace and serenity one would like to enjoy on the road to progress. It fills well the vacuum, which does not exist. However, one would feel the want if the Primal Principles do not emphatically provide for stability and serenity.

That is one of the reasons it is called SPENTÂ ‘progressive, increasing’ in the Gathas.² It is not a static state of comfort. It is moving, progressing, active, and productive. That is one of the reasons it is closely linked with the *khshathra*, the settled order. That is one of the reasons why the later Avestan composers made her represent the good earth.³ And that is the main reason I derive it from *â-ram* (compare modern Persian *ârâm* ‘peaceful, tranquil’ and *ârâmesh* ‘peace, tranquility’) and render ÂRAMAITI as SERENITY. It completes the Divine Doctrine of Zarathushtra, based Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds for progressive peace—SPENTÂ ÂRAMAITI—to wholeness and immortality.

Mazda Ahura, our “ally through *vohu manah* and good friend through the glorious *asha*” tells us by means of *khshathra*: “We have chosen the good and progressive SERENITY (*spentâm âramaitîm vanguhîm*) for you.” And we all readily respond, “(*Hâ nê anghat*) May it be our ours!” (Song 5.2; Yasna 32.2).

Hâ nê anghat!

² Songs 5.2; 6.13, 7.9, 14.2, 16.4, 16.11 (Yasna 32.2; 33.13, 34.10, 34.9, 49.2, 51.4, 51.11)

³ See Yasna 31.9, 34.10, 44.6, 47.2, and 49.10 for this usage in the Gathas. – CG