



Yoga, Sanyāsa and Jeevanamukti (The Bhagavat Gitā Perspective)

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Abstract: Yoga is the art of living a disciplined life. *Sanyāsa* is the art of renunciation in life. *Jeevanamukti* is the art of living a free life without attachment. All these three concepts and ethical paradigms are concerned with our practical life. These are not mere speculations with philosophical jargons. The *Bhagavat Gitā* teaches both *karma yoga* and *karma sanyāsa* and their compatibility in living a life of *Jeevanamukta*. Freedom is the highest pursuit of human life. But the freedom that is experienced in our pragmatic life and keeps us engaged in all worldly assignments with the sense of detachment is called *Jeevanmukti*. This is the goal of life. *Yoga* and *Sanyāsa* are the spiritual disciplines through which we can aspire for *Jeevanamukti* in this empirical world of attachments and sufferings.

Keywords: Yoga, Sanyāsa, Jeevanamukti, Dharma, Purusārtha, Moksa.

I. Introduction

The attainment of the state of *Yoga* appears to be the focal concern of the *Bhagavat Gitā*. This is evident from the fact that the title of each chapter is suffixed with the term 'Yoga'. *Yoga* is the psycho-physical discipline for attaining the state of unification of the lower self with the supreme self. Psycho-physical disciplines are not only confined to *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyām*. *Yoga* does not start with meditation and ends with meditation. *Yoga* is not merely a theoretical study of *Yama* and *Niyama*. In the *Bhagavat Gitā*, *Yoga* is construed as 'the way of life', 'the evenness of mind', 'the dexterity in action', 'the realization of the Ultimate Truth', 'the pure devotion', 'the art of renunciation', and so on. *Yoga* is the synthesis of knowledge, action and devotion. *Yoga* is the perfection and purification of the body, mind and soul. The *Bhagavat Gitā* gives a holistic approach to the understanding of *Yoga* as both theory and practice. As a theory, it focuses on the discipline of every aspect of human life and as a practice, it is regarded as the treatise of practical living. The *Bhagavat Gitā* is not a *Dharma Sāstra* or merely a religious book dealing with religious prescriptions, rites and rituals and it is not confined to any particular religion. The *Bhagavat Gitā* is not limited to Hinduism. The *Bhagavat Gitā* is not for any privileged people of any caste, creed and colour. The *Bhagavat gitā* is a treatise of mankind which preaches the ethics of humanity. Therefore, the *Bhagavat Gita* is regarded as *Yoga Sāstra* signifying *Yoga* as the discipline of life of each and every man¹. *Yoga* is the principle of unification. *Yoga* never divides. Similarly, a *Yoga Sāstra* is that scripture which unifies the whole mankind through the ethics of humanity. *Yoga* is the conscious effort to negotiate the gap between finite and infinite, manhood and Godhood. Every form of 'Yoga' presupposes a view of reality and the place of 'man' therein. In this article we shall have an attempt to examine how *Yoga* leads to a life of *Sanyasa* and *Jeevanamukta* in this practical life. For this understanding we shall focus on the cardinal values of human life known as

*Purusartha*² *Karma Yoga* and *Karma Sanyasa*, Renunciation of action and Renunciation in action and above all the secret of self-transformation.

II. Yoga

Yoga does not start with meditation and ends with meditation. *Yoga* is not merely a theoretical study of *Yama* and *Niyama*. In the *Bhagavat Gita*, *Yoga* is construed as 'the way of life', 'the evenness of mind', 'the dexterity in action', 'the realization of the Ultimate Truth', 'the pure devotion', 'the art of renunciation', and so on. *Yoga* is the synthesis of knowledge, action and devotion. *Yoga* is the perfection and purification of the body, mind and soul. Human life is value-centric. *Karma Yoga* teaches the art of involving in an action in such a way that the agent will not be attached with either with the agency, or action or even the consequences. According to the *Bhagavat Gitā*, *Nishkāmakarma* is the karmic-paradigm. *Nishkāmakarma* literally means *karma* without *kāmanā*. But this is not possible in an action situation. No *karma* is possible without *kāmanā* or desire. So desire is a must. We should have motivation and orientation for initiating any *karma* but we should not have unnecessary attachment for any desire. Attachment for desires multiplies into many desires in the infinite regress. Desires should be controlled and regulated. Desires should be duty-oriented. We should have attachment in the sense of detachment. *Isaopanisad* highlights this art of attachment in the first verse saying that *Tena tyektena bhunjitha*.³ Performance of any *karma* involves the agent, the very action and the consequences but *karma yoga* teaches how to be detached from all these three components by the karmic paradigm of *Nishkāmakarma*. The agent must be there to perform an action but he should not be attached with the sense of agency (*kartābhāva*). The sense of agency develops the sense of ego which disturbs the flow of action. Similarly, the *karma* must have the consequences but the agent should not be attached to the inevitable consequences.⁴ The *Bhagavata Gitā* teaches that we have all right

over our action, but no right over its consequences. Action is done in the present and the consequences occur in the future. Future is always uncertain and unpredictable. Therefore, being in the present moment we should not have unnecessary attachment for future consequences over which we do not have any control. When the agent begins to act without the attachment with the agency and the consequences, he becomes a *nishkāmakarmi* and feels that he has no attachment with the very action done by him. The action is factually done by the agent but there is a feeling as if no action is done. This is the state of actionlessness or inaction (*akarma*). So the basic components of *karma* such as the agent, action and the consequences become secondary for a *karma yogi* and he performs all *karmas* in the sense of *yajna* and *lokasangraha*. According to Lord Krishna, *yoga* is the capacity to engage in an activity. By his deeds, the agent is not connected to the karmic nexus. The notion of agency is the sole thing that ties the agent to the nexus (*kartābhāva*).

The *Bhagavata Gītā* explicitly maintains that *Lokasangraha* (wellbeing of all) should be the motive of all actions.⁵ We are not asked here to renounce the fruits of actions as such and not to ignore them, but we are only warned to renounce our mental attachment and intellectual clinging to the expected and imaginary fruits. Only when we get preoccupied with the expected fruits of our actions we come to exhaust ourselves, and thus become inefficient in our activities. A real action is one which is permeated with devotion. An ideal action culminates in devotion (*bhakti*). Devotion is a state where all the cognitive, conative and affective pursuits of the individual are directed to one end. It is in the state of *Bhakti* that the impersonal is made personal, the universal is made particular and the individual finds everything as the manifestation of the Lord. Everything becomes sacred for him and his love for the ultimate expresses itself in form of love for the whole creation.

*The Bhagavat Gītā asserts, Perform action O Dhananjaya, abandoning attachment, being steadfast in Yoga, and balanced in success and failure. Evenness of mind is called Yoga.*⁶

The sense of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’ disappears as a result of complete identification with the Lord and his manifold manifestations. For a devotee every action becomes a sacrifice (*yajna*) and all actions become directed towards the upliftment of the whole (*lokasangraha*). A bhakta becomes a true *Niskamakarmi* and it is he who knows the Self to be the essence of everything. *Bhakti* leads one to the state of unconditional surrender (*prapatti*). In the state of *Prapatti* one has the feeling of unworthiness (*akincanatva*) which makes one realize one’s limitations and accept God as the ultimate agent of all actions. Cultivation of devotion does not deny the role of free-will. It does not negate rational thinking. Rather devotion is said to be the result of the righteous use of reason and will. It has been observed how true knowledge leads to right action and right action becomes an instance of devotion. Lord Krishna does not impose His will and His ways on Arjuna and having explained everything asked him to take decision by himself. Knowledge gives direction to devotion because without knowledge devotion may take the form of dogma. It is action that gives content to devotion. Devotional sentiment has to be expressed in and through action. The highest devotee is said to be a *Sthitaprajna*.⁷ The attainment of this state of equanimity is

feasible by the synthesis of knowledge, action and devotion (Jnana, karma, bhakti samuchaya).

III. *Sanyāsa*

Sanyasa means renunciation and the person who follows the path of sanyasa is known as a renunciate or a *Yogi*. In common parlance, *Sanyāsa* is misunderstood as the renunciation of all activities and flying away from the world of attachments and responsibility. But the *Bhagavat Gītā* interprets *Sanyāsa* in a very pragmatic way emphasizing the active involvement of a *Yogi* in the world of diversities. By mere renunciation-of –action (*sanyāsa*) no one attains perfection. Running away from life is not the way to reach the highest goal of evolution. Attachment to *karma* leads to bondage. Attachment to the results of *karma* leads to greater bondage. Hence one should be free from both the attachment of *karma* and the consequences thereof. This is known as “Renunciation in action”. In our practical life this spiritual *sādhana* should be practised by all humans for attaining *Karma yoga*. Here in this paper one thing we shall discuss whether “renunciation in action” is better or the “renunciation of action” is better. In common parlance it is discussed that renunciation in action is better than renunciation of action. But in the *Bhagavat Gītā*, it is declared that ‘**renunciation of action**’ is better than ‘**renunciation in action**’. The understanding of the concept “renunciation of action” has double meaning leading to two diverse paths. One meaning of this concept is very familiar that one should avoid doing any action and this attitude is condemned in the *Bhagavat Gītā*. One should not refrain from the actions meant for the individual and society at large. To live is to act. Without action one cannot live. So “renunciation of action” in this sense is unethical and can never be accepted in our practical life. Another meaning of this concept of “renunciation of action” is that one should renounce certain actions which are not conducive for spiritual transformation. This is called *Karma Sanyāsa* in the *Bhagavat Gītā*.⁸ In this sense renunciation of action or *karma sanyāsa* is better than renunciation in action or *karma yoga*. Both *karma yoga* and *karma sanyāsa* are significant in our practical life. The eighteenth chapter of the *Bhagavata Gītā* has made a clear distinction between *tyāga* (abandonment) and *sanyāsa* [renunciation] relating to the distinction between *karma yoga* and *karma sanyāsa*. *Karma Sanyāsa* is the complete giving up of all desire-prompted activities and *karma yoga* is the art of giving up of all anxieties for enjoying the fruits of action. Action is an effort put forth in the present which fulfils itself into the desired fruit and the fruit is what we reap later on as a result of the present action. A desireless action belongs to the present, while the anxiety to enjoy the fruit is a disturbance of our mind regarding a future period of time. The fruit comes after the action and it is the culmination of an action undertaken in the present. Desire and agitation bring about restlessness, and the deeper the desire, the greater is the dissipation of our energies within. A dissipated man cannot execute any piece of work with steady efficiency and true ardour. Desire is always ordered by the ego. Elimination of the ego is at once the sublimation of the individuality and the ascension of the individual from the lower realm of consciousness to the uppermost stratum of the Universal Awareness.

Karma Yoga teaches the skill of doing an action without the sense of agency and expectation of the consequences. Here the doer thinks himself as a mere instrument and acts according to the will of the divine. *Karma Yoga* prescribes both the skill of action

and the tranquil of intention. “*Yoga Karmesu kousalam*” and “*Samatyam Yoga Uchyate*” are two basic disciplines of *Karma Yoga*. Thus *Karma Yoga* means the act of connecting the lower with the higher through a technique consisting of one’s own self-evolution.

Action is equivalent to inaction when it is done devoid of all desires and attachments. The twentieth verse of fourth chapter of the *Bhagavat Gītā* says,

having abandoned attachment to the fruits of action, ever content, depending on nothing, he does not do anything, though engaged in actions⁹.

Renunciation of fruits of action does really mean to renounce our mental attachment and intellectual clinging to the expected fruits. Our body, mind and the intellect act in the world of diversity, but not the Self. So one, who is established in the Self (*Ātma nista*), though he is engaged in action, cannot not be said to do any action. Action is posited by the awareness of the ego as the agent. Action is negated by the realisation of the Self. A Self-realized Saint’s activities do not touch him at all since he is not the actor; the actions only flow through him.

The sages understand *Sanyasa* to be “the renunciation of works with desire”; the wise declare “the abandonment of the fruits of all actions” as *Tyaga*.¹⁰

This verse makes a clear-cut distinction between *Tyaga* and *sanyasa*. *Tyaga* is the renunciation of the fruits of action whereas *Sanyasa* is the renunciation of the desire-prompted actions. Desire and agitation bring about restlessness, and the deeper the desire, the greater is the amount of dissipation of our energies within. A dissipated man cannot execute any piece of work with steady efficiency and true ordour. Desire is always prompted by ego. A desire-ridden person suffers from constant anxieties to enjoy the fruits of his actions. Action is always done in the present but the fruits come in the future. Future is always uncertain. So how can one be attached with the future fruits which are not sure to take place as the fruit of an action? So *Sanyasa* means renunciation of agency and ego. However, *tyaga* is different from *Sanyasa*. *Sanyasa* is an attitude of living a practical life with the sense of detachment whereas *tyaga* is the abandonment of the fruits of an action. There are many ethical values which cannot be relinquished such as sacrifice, gift and austerity. Similarly the obligatory actions are not proper to be abandoned.

Verily, the renunciation of ‘obligatory actions’ is not proper; the abandonment of the same from delusion is declared to be *Tamasik*.¹¹

All acts be abandoned as evil, declare some philosophers; while others declare that acts of sacrifice, gift and austerity should not be relinquished.¹²

Karma Sanyāsa is possible by the annihilation of ego and egocentric activities. The state of egolessness leads to the state of actionlessness. This is a psychic transformation of mind centered in knowledge. Dexterity in action is *Karma yoga* but complete renunciation of the *Karma-vāsanā* is *Karma sanyāsa*. In *Karma sanyāsa*, our senses are offered into the fire of self-control, so that the senses get burnt up, contributing a greater freedom and joy in

our inner life. Then we become capable of controlling our mind and enjoy the state of peace and joy though we are fully engaged in activities.

Karma Sanyāsa is the main objective of *Karma Yoga*. Positivity and single-mindedness of thought are the psychic traits that quickly develop in someone well-established on the path of *karma yoga* and *karma sanyāsa*. The actions of the body, mind, and intellect can no longer have any impact on the Self once our true Nature is known. *Yogis* act solely with their body, mind, intellect, and senses in order to purify themselves after having given up attachment (ego). This is the secret of *Karma Yoga*. A *Yogi* who can control the urge brought on by cravings is actually a joyful person. The *Yogi* who is joyful, content, and detached from within achieves *Moksha*, or complete freedom. *Niskāmakarma* occurs when a person acts out of instrumentality, with no regard for the consequences, and surrenders all consequences to God. For this person, everything is *Brahman*. The secret to success is revealed in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. The *Gītā* criticises a life of complete indulgence because it reduces people to the status of animals.

The *Bhagavat Gītā* asserts,

He who does actions, offering them to Brahman, abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin, just as a lotus leaf remains unaffected by the water on it.¹³

In this verse it is explained how one remains unattached even doing an action in the practical life. The secret of this success is that one should remain contented having abandoned the attachment for the fruits and offering the fruits to Brahman and lives a life of detachment like the water in the lotus leaf. It is common for people to have cravings (*kama*) for their bodies, minds, and spirits. If a desire is motivated by the moral standard of virtuous behaviour (*dharma*) and shaped to achieve freedom, then it is worthwhile to pursue (*moksa*). *Niskāma* does not imply the lack of *kāmanā* in the *Bhagavat Gītā*. Instead, *niskāma* refers to the ultimate goal of an action, which is *lokasangraha* or societal well-being. *Niskāma* is a condition of indifference rather than desirelessness. This is such a state in which every *kāma* is for *lokasangraha* and every *karma* becomes an instance of *Yajna*.

Karma Sanyasa teaches the higher order of inaction. Inaction or *Akarma* has been interpreted in two different senses. Some commentators interpret inaction as the state of actionlessness or the Self-hood. *Akarma* or inaction can also be interpreted to mean ‘unactivity’ or the state of *sattvik* peace and joy. The agent can undergo two distinct experiences while doing an action. He may stop acting physically but he is fully engaged in *karma-vāsanā* in his mental and intellectual activity. On the other hand, he may be acting physically with full alertness but mentally and intellectually may be unattached and be a simple observer. This is the state of unactivity or the *sattvik* state of peace and joy. Right action, done with right intention for selfless welfare of the society or community, creates a sense of complete detachment and makes the agent a disinterested observer of all that is happening within and without him. When an individual detaches himself and observes his own activities his actions get converted to the state of meditation. We cannot say that one is inactive as merely because he is keeping quiet. On the other hand, we cannot say that one is active when one is really involved in performing his duties. Such

an individual who can thus stand constantly apart from himself and observe the activity in inactivity and complete inactivity even in the highest activity is called *Ātma Yukta*. *Karma Sanyāsa* is possible by the annihilation of ego and egocentric activities. The state of egolessness leads to the state of actionlessness. This is a psychic transformation of mind centred in knowledge. Dexterity in action is *Karma yoga* but complete renunciation of the *Karma-vāsanā* is *Karma sanyāsa*. In *Karma sanyāsa*, our senses are offered into the fire of self-control, so that the senses get burnt up, contributing a greater freedom and joy in our inner life. Then we become capable of controlling our mind and enjoy the state of peace and joy though we are fully engaged in activities.

IV. Jeevanamukti

The attainment of *Jeevanamukti* is possible by the complete understanding of the dialectical perspectives of *Karma Yoga* and *Karma Sanyāsa*. Both *Karma Yoga* and *Karma Sanyāsa* are disciplines in our activities. Both of these disciplines insist that work we must. Work can gain a total transmutation by the removal of the things that clog our efficiency, and thus every piece of work can be made to yield its fullest award. Snapping the chains that shackle us with the past and the future and working in the full freedom and inspiration of the present, is the noblest way to perform actions. *Karma Yoga* teaches the skill of doing an action without the sense of agency and expectation of the consequences. Here the doer thinks himself as a mere instrument and acts according to the will of the divine. *Karma Yoga* prescribes both the skill of action and the tranquil of intention. Thus *Karma Yoga* means the act of connecting the lower with the higher through a technique consisting of one's own self-evolution. All actions should not be abandoned because without action one cannot live. But those actions which are desire-motivated and evil-oriented should be abandoned for the elevation of finest perfection in life. The tragedy of life becomes complete if a desire-ridden individual comes under the endless persecution of steady anxiety to enjoy the fruits of his actions. Fruits of actions belong to the future and they are always ordered by the quality and quantity of the action in the present moment, and also by the circumstances available in the chosen field of activity. Without the abandonment of our clinging attachment to the expected fruits of our actions, we will not discover the full potentialities of our personality. Thus *Karma Sanyāsa* is the goal which is to be reached through *Karma Yoga*. In the process of practising *Karma Yoga*, one can attain the state of *Karma Sanyāsa* which is the state of actionlessness (*naiskarmya*)¹⁴ and in that state one becomes a true *Karma Yogi*.

In Indian culture we believe in four types of values which are called *Purusārthas*. These four values of life are known as *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kāma* and *Moksa*. *Artha* and *kāma* are empirical values which are necessary for human existence in the mundane world. *Moksa* is the transcendental value which is honoured as the highest value and called *Parama Purusārtha*. *Dharma* is the bridge between these two levels of human existence. *Dharma* regulates empirical existence according to the principle of righteousness and helps it transcend to the transcendental existence (*moksa*) which can be attained but not experienced. *Moksa* or ultimate freedom from the life-cycle is attainable but not experienciable because in this state there is no distinction between the three faculties of cognition such as experience, object of experience and the subject of experience. This is also known as disembodied state of freedom or *videhamukti*. This transcendental state of freedom or

videhamukti is accepted by almost all orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. But *jeevanamukti* is attainable and experienciable in our practical life. *Jeevanamukti* is the empirical pursuit of freedom which is attained by psychic discipline through rigorous ethical practices. By the word '*jeevanamukti*' literally we mean '*mukti* in *jeevana*' or living freely while living our life. Out of the four *Purusārthas*, *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kāma* are directly regulated by the state of *Jeevanamukti* and in the next step, when one has already attained *Jeevanamukti*, one can attain the highest freedom from life cycle which is known as *Videhamukti*. But in order to attain this highest form of disembodied freedom, one must be qualified to attain the state of *Jivanamukti*. *Jivanamukti* is the state of freedom while living an embodied life. The *Bhagavat Gītā* has given much importance on *Jivanamukti* as it is the highest form of self-transformation. The self transforms from ignorance to knowledge and from bondage to liberation gradually through spiritual *sādhana* or through the practice of *Yoga*. Any person who commits to a life of constant virtue cultivation can reach the state of perfection. It is necessary for the aspirant to make rigorous preparations. The ultimate wisdom and the qualities of an ideal moral agent—acting with a sense of complete surrender for the benefit of everyone (*Lokasangraha*)—are both present when one is poised in the state of *Jivanamukta*.

The *Bhagavat Gītā* asserts:

Having suppressed all of their senses, being calm at all times, and focused on the welfare of all beings, they arrive at Me.¹⁵

Jeevanamukta performs action, but he is free from the shackles of action. He continues to live with the least sense of attachment to anything in particular due to the momentum created by his prior *karma*. One who loves everything is unattached to anything. As long as the previous *samskaras* haven't been completely exhausted, a *Jeevanamukta* can continue to exist in the physical body. He achieves *Videha Mukti*, or disembodied emancipation, with the destruction of his corporeal body. The emancipated person behaves without any sense of attachment to the things in the world. The mind and the sensory-motor system serve as merely tools to carry out the divine will. By the body, the mind, the intellect, and even by the simple senses, *Yogins* do action for the self-purification of the Self without attachment.²⁷ The potter and the wheel serve as an analogy to depict the condition of *Jeevanamukti*. The potter's wheel is observed to move even when the potter does not inject any more momentum, and the wheel keeps moving even after the force imparted to it has ceased to exist. It has two implications. The states of *Jivanamukti* and *Videhamukti* unmistakably demonstrate that the physical body is not a barrier to liberation. It is a condition of awareness that is reachable even when one is very closely tethered to the life of activity. The *Gītā* encourages resignation in action rather than outright inactivity. Instead of promoting otherworldliness, it recommends an activist lifestyle that, when practised properly, might be a real chance for accelerating the emancipation process. The definition of yoga as the "art of doing action" (*Yogah karmasukousalam*) is accurate.

V. Conclusion:

Human existence is value-centric. Human life is subject to self-transformation. Man becomes mature and gets transformed day by day by his own karma and ethical discipline. Man is well

aware of the distinction between *karma*, *vikarma* and *akarma* pertaining to his own destiny. By doing good *karma* and by adopting the skills of doing *niskamakarma* man grows into a better personality. From an ordinary person one becomes a *karma yogi*. Again from a *karma yogi* one becomes a *karma sanyāsi*. Ultimately one lives a life of *jeevanamukta*. The focal point is here to note that *karma yoga*, *karma sanyāsa* and the state of *jeevanamukta* are all relevant to the life of activity. Man learns how to perform his duty with responsibility and sincerity in his practical life by following these three ethical paradigms. Many misconceptions regarding *karma yoga*, *karma sanyāsa* and *jeevanamukti* have been wiped out from the psyche of man by its proper interpretation with practical application. The *Bhagavat Gītā* is the only treatise which has given focus on human freedom and transformation at every stage of his life. The transition from bondage to liberation and attachment to detachment is possible by spiritual *sāadhanā* which is only a human possibility.

References

1. The battlefield of *Kuruksetra* is called *Dharmaksetra* as it is a ksetra of righteousness. This is mentioned in the very first verse of the *Bhagavat Gītā*.

Om tatsaditi srīmadbhagavadgītasu uanisatsu
brahmavidyayam yogasāstre śrī kṛṣṇarjuna samvade
arjunaviśadayoga nama prathamō dhyāyah. [BG.
Shanti Mantra]

BhagavatGītā, 1.1
2. Purusartha is the value schemata comprising of four cardinal values such as Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksa.
3. Verse -1, Isopanisad
4. *karmanyē vādhikaraste mā phaleṣhu kadāchana mā karmaphalaheturbhurma te sangostvakarmāni*.⁶

The *Bhagavat Gita*, II. 47
5. Ibid., III. 25
6. *Yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi sangam tyaktvā dhanañjaya; Sdhyasiddhyoh samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga uchyate*.⁶
The Ibid., II. 48
7. *Sthitaprajna* is the state of steady-wisdom. There is discussion about *Sthitaprajna* in the *Bhagavat Gita* in chapter two from the verses 54 to 72
8. The *Bhagavat Gita*, XVIII. 11
9. Ibid., IV. 20
10. Ibid., XVII - 2
11. Ibid., XVIII - 7
12. Ibid., XVIII - 3
13. Ibid., X - 10
14. Ibid., XVIII - 49
15. Ibid., XVIII - 61