ABSTRACT

The thesis deals with the relation of ‘ends’ and ‘means’ in terms of individual or group morality. The thesis through a review of literature on the topic is an attempt to understand and present an assessment of the possible problem of ends and means relationship and distinction of human purposive morality. The attempt has located the controversy to be around the maxim ‘end justifies the means’. However, the thesis is an attempt to bring together the scattered literature on the debate of morality of ends and means to enable a better understanding and some clarification of how the ‘ends’ and ‘means’ are related to morality in terms of persons or group of persons. The philosophical study of morality historically shows that there has hardly been an attempt to look at the concept of morality in terms of the relation of ends and means. Philosophers or thinkers have taken ‘ends and means’ only as an explanation or support for their larger arguments or projects and not for their own sake. Because of the scattered nature of the literature on the topic and the confusion it has given rise to the present thesis goes into the historical developments of morality, as it was felt that without clearing the obscurity a clear perspective on the contemporary debate on the morality of ends and means would not be possible. The philosophical discussion on ends and means can help us
understand the moral problem and the organising practices of man, especially the classification of ends and means as good or bad, which primarily depends on an understanding of relation of ends and means.

Liberal philosophers, except pragmatists, have argued that end does not justify the means and pointed out that means should be moral to attain an end. Moreover, the Liberal philosophers emphasised that the maxim ‘end justifies the means’ is identical with the Marxists and accuse them of being Machiavellian. The accusation added that the Marxists by this maxim are suggesting violent means for every end to be achieved. However, this is a misunderstanding that has developed primarily due to the irretrievable scatteredness of the literature on the topic. The Marxists articulations clearly show that they are willing to adopt peaceful means so long as it leads to the desired end, which is revolution leading to the emancipation of humanity. It is also a misconception of the Liberals that the Marxists consider an individual as a means for the social collective end.

Marxists aim is to overcome the divisions of society and to have a classless form of it. According to them the liberal ideology perpetuates and maintains the capitalist society of which the class domination is a necessary consequence, which, can only be overcome through revolution. However, since capitalism controls the
whole apparatus of the state and the society, and structures the conditions in the society and thereby the opportunities available, that is, in short, it controls the means, it ensures no room for peaceful revolution which in turn leads to bloody revolution, that is, adoption of violent means to lead to a classless society. Marxists argue that if violent means are aimed at obtaining the greatest happiness of the greatest number, then only the violent means are justified. Marxists argue that the means, adopted by them in this way is to achieve socialism. Those who want to effect change in the material conditions of society and thereby progress in society will have to confront the Liberals and their capitalist ideology. It is argued that the emphasis on peaceful means to achieve the end by the Liberals is for the reason that they want to retain their power in society and therefore they defy any change or progress. It is, therefore, the Liberals who are responsible for branding the maxim ‘end justifies the means’ as signifying violence.

Liberals separate means from ends in order to attach moral criteria with it, therefore, for Liberals means are fixed and rigid because of the element of morality in it. The morality of ends and means debate is insisted upon by the Liberals for its value as a political tool to be used against Marxists to continue their power in the society. Marxists clearly insist that in choosing the end one chooses its means also. The means are chosen because they are
appropriate and suitable to the ends to be achieved. The Marxist position is that ends and means are interdependent in such a way that the means, whether violent or non-violent, changes in accordance with the nature of the ends and the prevalent material conditions. The Marxists argue against the construction of morality by the Liberals into the relation of ends and means as primarily indicating a separation of ends from the means, which ruptures the interdependence between the two. It is because of this split by the Liberals, the Marxists argue, that means are demanded to be justified independently of the ends.

For Marxists, there is a need to change and to have a society free from class oppression and exploitation. Therefore, they think that it is necessary to locate social morality. They have criticised the Liberal notion of morality and preferred the human social morality, which changes in a progressive manner in the society. Therefore, the maxim ‘end justifies the means’ is not concerned with Marxists but it is a Liberal slogan to blame their challengers, the Marxists, which is then not moral but political or ideological.

The contemporary debate on the morality of ends and means between the Liberal and Marxists ideologies is political. It is a debate on the best means of acquiring the emancipation of mankind. In the context of the controversy of ends and means, morality can be defined as the principles or rules with the help of which individuals or
group of individuals in the society are governed. In a society there are individuals and different groups of individuals who have their own ideology to support their dominance in the society, and these ideologies are conveniently classed as morality. So, morality is, in fact, a group or class ideology, and when these ideologies try to dominate another ideology in the society, then it is not a question of morality but of political modalities and principles.

From Marxist point of view morality is neither moral nor immoral. It is part of the design of the Liberal society and it’s thought to perpetuate their dominance by creating confusion through subscribing the element of morality to the casual relationship of ends and means. This thesis shows that when morality appears in the public sphere then it becomes political.

Therefore, the debate on the maxim 'end justifies the means' and the relation of ends and means should be looked at more from the angle of group morality or as political. The debris of confusion is cleared by this thesis which may lead to some more research that would more clearly and categorically bring out the features of the relation between ends and means. However, morality of ends and means cannot ignore the political aspect of the ideological conflict and the confusion which is held even today.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the concept of morality
and its development and brings out its relationship with ethics and politics. It is argued in the chapter that actions viewed through the ends-means perspective show a reference to the moral or ethical or the political sphere. The chapter also tries to bring out the views of the critics of the concept of morality, including the Marxists.

The second chapter, ‘Origin of the Controversy’, of this thesis is an attempt to locate the logical relationship of ‘ends’ and ‘means’ in the light of the maxim ‘end justifies the means’ and to trace out the origin of the controversy. The chapter shows that the origin of the controversy over the maxim ‘end justifies the means’ can be identified with the engagement of Machiavelli and Jesuits in the issue. The chapter shows the debate in Machiavelli was not moral but political. Machiavelli propounded that the Prince (or the ruler) is free to adopt any means because he was not under any obligation to follow any transcendental moral or religious ideas. The maxim ‘end justifies the means’ was accepted by Machiavelli but restricted to the political arena for promotion of public good and the formulation or development of a polity.

The third chapter of the thesis outlines the controversy on morality of ends and means. The chapter is a survey of the debate regenerated in modern moral philosophy where it is found that there are two basic liberal moral theories, namely, Deontology and
Teleology. However, both moral theories centre on the individual action, which identifies the liberal approach. These two theories differ only on the point that Deontology is based on rule without care for consequence, while teleology is based on consequence and at times ignoring means altogether.

The fourth chapter focuses on the contemporary thought on ‘ends and means’, which is best available in the debate between pragmatist liberal philosopher John Dewey and Marxist philosopher Leon Trotsky. The entire debate hinges on the moral aspect of the ends-means relation, which both the philosophers were interrogating. This chapter shows that both Dewey and Trotsky agree on the validity of the maxim ‘end justifies the means’ and ends and means are interdependent. They agree on the point that end justifies the means and therefore, violent means are permissible, specifically in an attempt to do away with class domination, that is, abolition of power of man over man, or exploitation in the society, that is liberation from oppression in the society, and in the case of increasing the power of man over nature. For both the thinkers the liberation of mankind is the end, for according to them in any legitimate and rational sense of morality liberation of mankind is a moral end.

The thesis concludes that a lot of confusion has arisen due to the fierce ideological battle between the Liberals and the Marxists.
However, the pragmatists, who are the latest brand of Liberals, and Marxists are in agreement but disagree only to the extent of methodological niceties, whereby the emphasis, as far as pragmatists are concerned, in Marxism is on class conflict leading to generality at the cost of ignoring other factors. The debate between Marxist and Liberal philosophers hinges on the importance each lays on the individual or human social equality. This is even more easily noticeable in the contemporary debate between Dewey and Trotsky on morality of ends and means, where it is apparent that their differences are with regard to the focus on individuals or social, that is, particular or general. The pivotal aspect of the debate has arisen out of the ideological conflict of the Liberals and Marxists.