ABSTRACT

Essentially Contested Political Concepts: A Philosophical study is the topic of my research. I choose this topic for the reason that it is one of the most current debates in the political philosophy. Gallie in 1956 wrote a scholarly article where he discussed this problem at length. He framed some seven postulates forwarding serious contentions to prove that some concepts are essentially contested. By this idea he means that the terms used for these concepts have different meanings in different situations. The scholars do not agree on any one use of the term. The modifications in the use by the authors make these concepts rather more complex. The meaning becomes ambiguous. The concept apparently simple commonly understood immediately becomes problem orientated. Gallie analyses concepts from different fields and tries to show the complexity inherent in the meaning of referred concepts. He gives live and artificial examples from Christianity, Art and Politics and also points out that such concepts are present in almost all the realms of social sciences. The natural sciences of course have no such ambiguous concepts. The term used in them can be defined and agreed upon. Different scientists work on the same definition and build their edifice on this foundation. During this research I found that Gallie was correct and the contestability is the characteristic of at least the key concepts of social sciences including philosophy and Art. with this inference I tried to examine the concepts of democracy, Power & Liberty with the claim that the authors dealing with these
concepts do not agree with each others and argue their positions sometimes logically and sometimes rhetorically.

I choose this topic for another reason that I may be aware of the recent debates in the political thought. I found that the scholars like Mason; Connolly & Gray have very energetically participated in the debate and have appreciated Gallie’s idea. I have come to the conclusion having gone through the whole debate that Gallie and his contemporary are not very clear and could not explain unequivocally the meaning of essentially contestedness. In our opinion there is a disagreement in the use of referred concepts nevertheless the element of universality and the abstract meaning deduced from the original word is subject to no change. As soon as we use the words democracy, power or liberty, even the common man familiar with the language understands their meaning. He is not stressed by the disagreement that persists among the scholars. It means besides the essential contestedness there is a universal appeal in these concepts which makes then plausible to the common man.

Gallie’s paradigm seems to be skeptic. Disputability is in the very nature of these concepts that is why they become essentially contested. If this preposition is upheld, it would mean that Gallie’s attempt is nihilistic. He is of the view that there is an endless dispute in the use of all these concepts. If it is true, we would not arrive at any conclusion. Skepticism, as we know leads to nihilism. Gallie, however, considers it to be a positive quality to which we don’t agree.
The study is divides along with introduction & conclusion in four chapters.

In the Introduction we have introduced the problem and tried to bring out its importance in the contemporary political thought. Before coming to the main thesis we have also explained the concepts of the concept, its meanings and nature. In the palaver on the concept we have highlighted the cognitive and the psychological theories of the concept. In the beginning the chapter leads with Socrates, Plato and other scholars who have presented their theories to explain the concept. It is deemed essential, for, without understanding the concept we could not deliberate upon their being essentially contested.

In the first chapter after the Introduction we have discussed the nation of essential contentedness. Needless to say, Gallie and his contemporaries have found due place in this chapter. We have also dealt with the critics of Gallie like Gray and Mason. It should be noted that Connolly, Mason & Gray give their own argument for the essential contentedness in the without rejecting Gallie altogether. The only defer with his arguments.

The second chapter discusses Democracy as one of the Essential Contested Concept we have started it with the definitions of democracy followed by its history and forms. Besides we have also dealt with Gallie’s argument for considering the democracy as one of the essentially contested concepts. Gallie here has deliberated upon seven points (I) their appraiseisive character, (II) internal complexity, (III) diverse describability, (IV) openness, (V) reciprocal recognition of their contested character among contending parties, (VI) an original exemplar
that anchors conceptual meaning, and (VII) progressive competition, to prove it as essentially contested. Apart from him we have also included other authors who agree with Gallie on its being essentially contested, but disagree with his arguments.

In the third chapter we have dealt with power as an essentially contested concept of course. With other political thinkers and common men idea of power we have discussed Luke’s who forcefully argues that the concept of Power is essentially contested.

The fourth chapter brings out liberty. It begins from the definitions of liberty. It also brings whom its history and different theories. We have discussed J.S. Mill, Berlin and have also mentioned Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau. In the history of liberty, we have given a brief account of Plato, Aristotle, and other erstwhile Sumerian and Greek Scholars. We have come to the conclusion that liberty is a value laden and most cherished concept in the modern and contemporary political thought.

In the conclusion we have given our argument and have partially rejected Gallie’s frame work on the contention that he has undermined the element of universality and the common use of the concepts.