

Conceptualising Sect and Sectarianism: An Exposition

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ABSTRACT

Conceptualising sect and sectarianism has still been a matter of debate. It is generally held that these concepts relate to the sociology of religion; however, their etymological evolution and interdisciplinary applications have led to substantial ambiguity in both scholarly and public understanding. Different etymological versions are specified regarding their historical origins and meanings, but no disgusting meaning has been reported. Initially, the use of terms was unbiased; however, the modern concept is markedly different from the historical one, which is based on a politicised, narrow viewpoint. The paper aims to explore the evolution of these connotations while highlighting the disjunction between their etymological history and modern concepts. The study applies a qualitative methodology by employing a multi-theoretical and interdisciplinary approach to discuss its dynamics, mechanisms and implications. A key finding of this study reveals that sectarianism has become a multi-dimensional and multi-faceted phenomenon today, encompassing historical, cultural, ethnic, political, and economic perspectives; therefore, it cannot be appraised exclusively in terms of a socio-religious phenomenon. However, its economic perspective has not gained the pertinent attention of scholars to delineate its role and implications.

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INTRODUCTION

There are not enough academic studies to comprehensively conceptualise sect and sectarianism concerning their etymology, meanings, nature, dynamics, and mechanisms. Many scholars believe these concepts relate to the sociology of religion, a narrative being generated on the basis of their etymological history. Historically, the genesis of these terminologies has been reported in the Latin dialect for the first time in the 3rd century BCE. Another trace has been found in the old French dialects, but its time period is unidentified. It is important to note that initially, these terms were used unbiasedly to indicate or denote the followers of a socio-religious, philosophical, or other related group. However, later etymological progression overtook from good to bad and positive to negative expressions due to incorporating divergent scholarly interpretations and introducing new interdisciplinary approaches. Consequently, the modern concept appeared different from its historical version. For instance, in Arabic, the word "sect" (ta'ifah) used to be descriptive; however, modernly, sectarianism (ta'ifiyyah) has changed it to a negative, politicised concept. As a concept, the subject matter of these terms is still debatable as a wide gap prevails between literary meanings and scholarly interpretations. Aforementioned terms are rooted in the sociology of religion; nonetheless, other dynamics, such as historical, cultural, ethnic, political, and economic, can also not be ignored.

The paper aims to explore the evolution of these connotations while highlighting the disjunction between their etymological history and modern concepts. The study applies a qualitative methodology by employing a multi-theoretical and interdisciplinary approach to discuss its dynamics, mechanisms and implications. In this regard, modern concepts and relevant research approaches related to sociology of religion, political sociology of religion and identity politics are discussed.

The paper is categorised into four parts. Part one deals with the introduction. Part two elucidates the meaning and nature of sect in the light of its etymological history and modern concept. It also discusses the relevant research approaches. Part three explains the meaning and nature of sectarianism comprehensively. This part also discusses its dynamics and mechanism by applying relevant research approaches. Part four deals with concluding remarks.

Understanding Sect: Etymology and Meaning

The meaning and nature of sectarianism cannot be conceptualised without understanding the definition, meaning, origin and development of the term sect. It can be comprehensively elaborated with reference to the sociology of religion and historical political sociology (Metthiesen, 2014).

There is no universally accepted definition of the term sect. Some use it as synonymous with 'denomination' and by others as synonymous with 'cult' (Braden, 1948). It is also labelled as the meaning of sect as deviation or heterodoxy (Fuglseth, 2005). Hence, the lack of a unanimous consensus on the literary meaning of sect creates further confusion in understanding it. As discussed above, the modern concept of sect, as a connotation, is markedly different from its historical version. It is due to its intersection with other academic expressions. Azmi Bishara (2021) writes that the connotation of sect today refers to a group of followers who adhere to particular philosophical, religious, or political beliefs. It is accepted as a separate entity when its teachings and practices differ from or remain opposite to the mainstream religious community. It generally represents a religious faction that has been disassociated from a major religious group. According to Usama Kiyak (2018), "The sect is a community that subscribes to certain religious beliefs from the past. These beliefs, at the time of their formation [can be] the expression of the ideological and class conceptualisation of a certain social group. This conceptualisation is transformed into a religious belief when there is a societal collapse and social groups become closed, whereupon these conceptualisations are reformulated as "mythological beliefs". To unveil its further conceptual manifestation, he entails that a sect is a group of individuals bound by specific beliefs and rituals that its members follow as a form of faith. The sect's existence is often maintained superficially. Additionally, members frequently marry within the same sect and perform particular funeral customs to ensure continuity and preserve their distinct identity. It is also noted that inherited beliefs and rituals do not always form the foundation for interactions with the broader society, which tends to have more widely shared customs and traditions. These beliefs typically diminish in prominence as modernist ideas gain ground, facilitating greater integration with society (Kiyak, 2018).

To account for its further literary meanings, we may also take help from distinguished dictionaries. According to the Oxford Dictionary, "sect is a group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs (typically regarded as heretical) from those of a larger group to which they belong" (Oxford English Dictionary). This definition emphasises religious differences, indicating that the mainstream faction frequently views heretical groups negatively. Furthermore, it characterises sects as offshoots that deviate in ways deemed unacceptable, reflecting historical disputes. Notable examples of the split between Catholics and Protestants, Sunnis and Shias, etc., are cases in point.

The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines the term sect as "a religious or political group that is connected to a larger group but that has beliefs that differ greatly from those of the main group" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

While this definition highlights significant differences, it does not include the term heretical, which presents a more neutral and contemporary perspective. It acknowledges ideological differences but refrains from making moral or doctrinal evaluations. Additionally, it is more inclusive by referencing political factions instead of just focusing on religious groups. Moreover, Thomas O’dea (n.d.) defines, “the term sect is used in the sociology of religion to designate a particular kind of religious group. This usage is more precise and technical than using the word in everyday speech. It is part of a typology of religious groupings that has been useful in studying religious movements and bodies”. Explaining sociological aspects in an academic context, the author uses the term within a typological framework, e.g., Church-sect-denomination-cult. This characterisation aids in comprehending the sect not merely as a splinter group but as a distinct structural form of religious organisation.

Regarding its historicity, the origins of the modern-day term ‘sect’ may be traced to the mid-14th century A.D. However, its etymological history is much older and has a diverse meaning. According to a reliable estimate, it was originated from the 3rd century BCE, and its first traces were found in the Latin dialect (Bishara, 2018). One perception is that it is derived out from the Latin term *secta*, which was used to indicate ‘religious group’ at that time, especially a heretical one. According to another perception, it derives from the old French word *secte* or *sete*, which means ‘religious community’; however, its time period is unspecified (Online Etymology Dictionary). It may be noted that initially, the use of the term was unbiased and associated with indicating that the followers were of a socio-religious, philosophical, or other related concepts and ideas, as mentioned above (Bishara, 2018). Over time, some notable developments regarding the meanings of *secta* occurred, hence a new meaning arose to express that it is the mindset or lifestyle that adheres to a particular ideological or philosophical movement or refers to the political organisation with whom one has sworn loyalty (N. Weber, 1912).

Furthermore, another perception asserts that *secta* is derived from *sectus*, a variant past participle of *sequi* that means “follow”. The Online Etymology Dictionary argues that there is confusion about the history of the Latin word *secta*, derived from the past participle of *secare*, which means to “cut” or “dissect”, giving a contrary meaning to the earlier concept¹ (Online Etymology Dictionary). Azmi Bishara (2018) Bishara (2018) expresses his concerns about the etymology of the word, whether it comes from the *seque* that means “to follow” or from *secere*, meaning “to cut”. Conversely, Skeat firmly argues that *secare*

¹The new meaning i.e. “separately organized religious body, the denomination” is recorded from the 1570s in a Protestant context and seems to carry more of a notion of a party “cut off” from the main body. Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “Sect,” Retrieved from <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=sect>

is not the root word of the term sect, but it has been derived from the term 'sequi', which means to follow (Skeat, 1889). Discussing the changing meaning of this connotation over time, N. A. N. Weber (1912) elucidates that this meaning was retained in the subsequent Catholic clerical usage; however, the connotation was rarely used in the early Christian era and the Middle Ages. Instead of this, "heresy" or "schism" were commonly used with clearer discourse. As the church had always placed a high value on correct teaching, it would logically choose the word heresy, which describes a problem with the teaching itself, over the word sect, which describes a problem with group separation.

Moreover, we also find the use of this terminology in Middle English to indicate a class of people, a race, a typical outfit and sex as well (Online Etymology Dictionary). Gradually, the semantic meaning of the term changed due to the introduction of new interdisciplinary research approaches like historical sociology, political sociology, etc. Literary, sect is 'a part splitting from a whole' or a 'split-off group'. In this context, sect refers to a separated group of individuals who affirm certain basic teachings of a religion as their core beliefs, instead of rejecting it completely (Danjibo, 2009).

Regarding its functions, Milton (1963) believes that the sect plays complex functions in society. A sect often serves as a release for the stresses and frustrations associated with lower-class status and the experience of social and economic marginalisation. Offering catharsis simultaneously provides a supportive community and a set of values that help members reorganise their personal lives and, in many cases, reintegrate into broader society. The sect helps reconcile members with their disadvantageous conditions by assuring compensations in this world and other worldly promises, and gives new meaning to their life experiences by reinterpreting them. Through this process, the sect may instil virtues in its members that contribute to their economic and worldly success (O'dea, n.d.). He further believes that the sect also helps guide its followers by offering a pathway in case of disorganisation so that they may come from social disorder (O'dea, n.d.).

According to a dominant perception, sect emerges as a natural upshot of religious dynamics and plays an active role in political manoeuvring. However, it is hard to determine the meeting place of religion and politics, where they both begin and end. Hence, their limits cannot be fixed. Keeping in view the above discussion, we cannot label it as only a religious phenomenon; instead, it also has a political manifestation (Peiro, 2013).

MEANING AND NATURE OF SECTARIANISM: LITERATURE REVIEW

To define the term sectarianism, like sect, is still a challenge for scholars today. Undeniably, ambiguities and paradoxes in terminologies often create definitional crises that misrepresent research paradigms. So, as with sectarianism, its subject matter has remained unclear as a concept, yet there is a wide gap in the literary meanings and scholarly interpretations. Fanar Haddad (2018) mentions that in most cases, scholars assume that what constitutes sectarianism is enough. Therefore, the term is left undefined. It is argued that “various scholars have made efforts to define it. However, they try to extract the meaning of sectarianism from the scholars’ perspectives and research rather than framing integrated and comprehensive definitions” (Haddad, 2018). It is noteworthy to highlight that in many cases, sectarianism has been defined in the light of certain features, levels and stages to frame perceptions. According to Justin, “sectarianism is a process which has stages of how to sectarianise others within certain contexts. It comprises stages from making a general grouping, denomination, confessionalism, and the sect. Within these stages, the final product represents a negative ideology behind sectarianism” (Shams & Kaileh, 2014). In short, sectarian means being bigoted, narrow-minded, inflexible, violent, etc., and such negatively charged perceptions that people hold today. In order to enquire into its literary meaning, a few dictionary definitions are given in the ensuing paragraphs.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, sectarianism is an “excessive attachment to a particular sect or party, especially in religion” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). Similarly, the Oxford Dictionary refers to it as “strong support for one particular religious or political group, especially when this leads to violence between different groups” (Oxford English Dictionary). The Oxford References defines sectarianism as “a narrow-minded adherence to a particular sect (political, ethnic, or religious), often leading to conflict with those of different sects or possessing different beliefs” (The Oxford References). For instance, in Arabic, the word “sect” (ta’ifah) used to be descriptive; however, modernly, sectarianism (ta’ifiyyah) has changed it to a negative, politicised concept. The examples from the real world, such as Sunni-Shia sectarianization in the Muslim world and Catholic-Protestant in the Christian world, unequivocally reflect the profound tensions that resulted from this syntactic transformation in religious, cultural, ethnic and political contexts.

An Exposition of Sectarianism

As far as its nature, dynamics and mechanism are concerned, a unanimous opinion of scholars proclaims that sectarianism is deeply rooted in religion.

However, its link to historical, socio-cultural, ethnic, political and economic factors cannot be ignored. Aligning with this discourse, Azmi Bishara (2018) states that sectarianism is a theoretical-historical issue and must be studied comprehensively. To enquire more deeply, a comprehensive interpretation is given below on the basis of pragmatic expressions and articulation of theories and approaches.

Sectarianism: As an issue of theological and religious mechanisms

It is held that sectarianism is born from religion. On this basis, it is labelled as a theological issue. Riikonen (2007) asserts that sectarianism and religion are indispensable to each other, as both have a close connection. Being a factor, religion constructs beliefs, attitudes, actions and structures that may involve a sectarian outlook. Individuals oppose this new manifestation as harmful or destructive. Moreover, sectarianism refers to any religious or doctrinal obstacle rooted in traditional beliefs that opposes those different from oneself, often leading to conflict rather than embracing diversity (Kiyak, 2018). It often exploits intra-group ideological differences and causes hatred or discrimination among the group members (Khan & Chaudhry, 2011). As a result, the escalation of force polarisation in society strengthens. Similarly, Atia Kareem (2008) explains, "sectarianism may be characterised by dogmatism and inflexibility. In a narrow sense, it denotes zeal for, or attachment to, a particular sect. Likewise, it connotes an excessively zealous and doctrinaire narrow-mindedness that would quickly judge and condemn those who disagree. However, in a broader sense, it refers to the historical process by which all the divisions in major world religions have come about". Ideologically, sectarianism breeds some important social actors, i.e., inferior and superior actors. In this regard, social power and dominance play a decisive role in negatively affecting society in socio-political and economic spheres (Fregonese, 2020).

Theorising Religion, Social Structure and Sectarianism

The intersection of religion, social structure and sectarianism has been a principal concern in sociological theories, with varying interpretations and frameworks offered by classical and contemporary thinkers. In this regard, Max Weber's role of religion in social stratification, Emile Durkheim's social cohesion and collective consciousness, Wilson's religious subtypes approach, Stark & Bainbridge's movement approach and Bishara's sociological-historical approach may indeed be applied to this study.

To begin with, Max Weber, a famous German sociologist and political economist, explores the link between religion and social stratification. He wrote "The Sociology of Religion" in 1922. While discussing the link between religion and

social stratification, M. Weber (1922) argues that religious groups can serve as forms of resistance to dominant societal norms and provide a distinct meaning, belonging, and social identity to their members. According to M. Weber (1922), religion often arises during periods of social change or disorder, and groups seek to distinguish themselves from mainstream religious institutions regarding identity or security. As regards the concept of sects, Weber believes that they emerge as responses to established religious institutions, often placing importance on spiritual devotion and purity rather than the bureaucratic systems of traditional churches. In this regard, the emergence of sects can be viewed as a form of religious distinction or opposition.

Contrary to Weber's perspective, Emile Durkheim frames religion as a force of sustaining social cohesion. He was a renowned French sociologist, known for his contributions to understanding the social role of religion. His famous work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912), examines relations between religious systems and social cohesion, wherein Durkheim argues that religious beliefs help unite individuals into communities and sectarianism can potentially arise when these collective bonds are disrupted or threatened by external forces (Jones, 1986). His concept of social solidarity explains the emergence of sectarianism during times of social instability or division. In these situations, groups seeking unity may increasingly identify themselves through their unique religious or sectarian affiliations. Moreover, sects arise when the broader social fabric deteriorates, leading individuals to form tighter and more uniform communities for a sense of belonging.

To stipulate and extend these classical approaches, Bryan R. Wilson's *Sects and Society* offers a typology of sectarian responses to the problem of evil. Wilson was one of the notable British sociologists of the 20th century, who contributed to the study of new religious movements and sects. In 1961, he authored a work titled "Sects and Society", which elucidates the typology of religious sects and classifies them into specific categories on the basis of their beliefs and practices. Wilson's Religious Subtypes Approach deals with religious elements to influence people and society, and also provides a framework for how religious groups interact with society and pursue their spiritual objectives. According to this approach, the subject matter of sectarianism is religious and spiritual commitments to be according to the divine canons. Wilson introduces some subtypes of responses against evil by using the process of sectarianism (Hindawi & Kadhim, 2021). These are specific types of religious answers to evil². Wilson categorises subtype responses as follows: Introversionists desire a purified community; Conversionists aim for a transformed self; Manipulationists seek a changed perception of evil; Thaumaturgists pursue specific miracles or

²One of the defects of Wilson's approach is that it does not define the 'evil'.

divine interventions; Reformists focus on changing or improving the world; Revolutionists strive for a world transformed by God; and Utopians work toward a reconstruction of the world through human effort (Jokiranta, 2010).

Moreover, these sectarian subtypes help appraise the abundance of new cult movements, which protested against modernity (Jokiranta, 2010). In brief, his work has profoundly influenced the sociology of religion as it has enhanced the horizon of understanding regarding the dynamics of sectarian movements and their roles within broader societal contexts.

Adding a rational choice dimension to this subject matter, Stark and Bainbridge conceptualise religious sects within a framework of social exchange. Stark and Bainbridge's movement approach presents a social-ideological colour of sect and sectarianism. It is known as a theory of religion that was introduced in the 1980s. In 1987, Stark and Bainbridge wrote a book, "A Theory of Religion", in which they theorise that religious movements are social networks offering compensators—rewards that are not immediately available in the present world but are promised in eternal life or through spiritual fulfilment. According to this approach, sect is a religious movement that appears owing to the reaction of individuals, who protect their beliefs in the wake of social and rational choices (Hindawi & Kadhim, 2021). On this premise, it is also considered a theory of exchange, or popularly known as a rational choice theory. The approach argues that due to social exchanges, religion arises in which individuals struggle for rewards and avoid costs (Hindawi & Kadhim, 2021). Hence, these sects and cult movements (religious movements) are important. Regarding the appearance of religious movements, S Stark and Bainbridge (1987) believe that they appear at the high-tension end, either help cause social change or prevent it. Compared to rewards, people tend to accept compensation because rewards often exist in limited quantity. According to Bainbridge (1997), "following the 'sect movement', a group of individuals within a religiously social context is deemed to set a deviant religious movement whose tenets are taken from the base organisation [religion] and the socio-cultural norms [though sometimes deviant]. Along with the sect, novel tenets that are related to the sect can be introduced through certain ways of interpreting particular divine sources. Such a movement is referred to as a 'cult'. Once such religious movements indoctrinate their own ideologies through either causing or preventing change to society, sectarian strategies of sectarianism are adopted and institutionalised to cover the planned ideology under the concerned sect".

In addition to the above functionalist and rationalist theories, a new but distinct perspective has been introduced by Azmi Bishara, a distinguished Palestinian intellectual and political analyst. Bishara adopts a sociological-historical approach that ties sectarianism explicitly to political power and identity

formation. Bishara's (2018) theory is a combination of a theory of sectarianism with a historical sociological study of the emergence of imagined communities of religion (today's religious ta'ifas), distinguishing between sects on the one hand and traditional local communities of religion on the other hand. This approach theorises that sectarian identities are formed due to contentions among political elites and internal and external influences, which in turn gain political significance in the wake of a power struggle. Contrary to the earlier concept that sects naturally breed sectarianism, Bishara's theory argues that the sectarianism revitalises and reinforces the sect, inculcating into the collective consciousness of society and helping transform it as an imagined community.

Sectarianism: As an Issue of Identity Politics

Besides theology or religion, the nature of sectarianism can be understood in the light of identity politics. As discussed above, it is basically a religious concept poised in society; however, its political perspective is also worth mentioning. Hoffman (2020) mentions that the religious affiliation of individuals is being politicised by different stakeholders in order to help them join sectarian groupings for their political interests. Menshawy (2022) argues that leaders are responsible for sparking sectarianism, implying that a transient phenomenon could change once those leaders are removed from power. In contrast, others argue that leaders do not create sectarianism but rather manipulate it, intensify or reignite existing divisions for their personal gain, and are always prepared to exacerbate the hostility as it benefits them. Ille (2021) contends that sectarianism should not be restricted to religious segregation and animosity between religious groups. He argues that it also involves discrimination and the rejection of valuable interactions based on varying political, territorial, identity, or class-based differences.

Religion is believed to be an all-embracing and all-encompassing social order; however, sectarianism segregates individuals from the main body. As a significant phenomenon, it can help study conflicts based on inter-group and intra-group identities. According to Gause (2013), it is necessary to "recognise the political context in which sectarianism becomes prominent in a country's politics and to realise that neither sectarian conflict nor sectarian political alliances are immutable. Similarly, religious (sectarian) identities also act upon and behave politically in terms of how people define themselves; they are neither always dominant nor always mean the same thing. Therefore, the contemporary political context is more important for understanding how sectarianism plays into modern conflicts and violence".

Politically, sectarianism is considered a destructive process for individuals and groups. It reduces avenues for mutual benefits of group members and increases the risk of competition and societal conflicts. Consequently, the environment of antagonism is born (Ille, 2021).

Theorising Identity Politics and Sectarianism

Regarding identity politics, some specific approaches may be applied in this context, such as the instrumentalist, constructivist and primordialist approaches. Ille (2021) specifies that these approaches are not consistently defined in the literature and often become vague or intertwined.

Instrumentalist Approach

The instrumentalist approach to ethnicity and sectarianism is a socially and politically constructed concept based on shared heritage and culture. This approach is based on two elements. Firstly, it argues that ethno-sectarian conflicts often appear due to a desire for economic gains, often expressed in terms of greed and grievance. Secondly, it asserts that the elites and leaders deliberately manipulate and encourage these conflicts based on their rational decision. (Weir, 2012). Sectarian identity is not innate; instead, it is politically constructed. Religious differences are strategically manipulated by leaders, particularly during competitive or crises, sometimes by instilling fear of domination or assimilation (Hashmi, 2016). Fearon and Laitin (2003) also point out that ethnic and sectarian conflicts emerge due to external forces and are sustained by the state and different political actors who build identities to promote their socio-political and economic objectives. In this regard, they stress similarities within their own group and highlight differences with others. As a set rule, identity mobilisation may be used as a tool or a strategy to achieve desired objectives. Hence, manipulation and mobilisation exert disturbing repercussions on both state and society in terms of repression, violence, and war (Mabon, 2022). Critics contend that instrumentalism ignores how identity claims can occasionally connect with the masses in a genuine way that goes beyond simple manipulation and is overly elite-focused (Hashmi, 2016). Moreover, by reducing identities to mere props, this approach implies that identity and agency have little influence on behaviour (Darwich & Fakhoury, 2016).

Constructivist Approach

Constructive approach also asserts that ethnicity and sectarianism pertain to socio-political concepts; however, it perceives identity politics as a process of history. The approach argues that these conflicts stem from historical processes that produce different ethnic identities and hostilities over time (Weir, 2012). Constructivist interpretation of sectarianism emphasises the institutionalisation of sectarian identities over time along with myth-symbol complexes, and invented traditions (Haddad, 2018). It also elucidates that supra-state and supra-national identities compete with state identities. Consequently, borderless movements emerge.

Primordialist Approach

Primordialism is another principal theory that explains ethnic (sectarian) identity mobilisation. According to Chi (2016), "ethnic identity is assigned at birth, inherent in human nature, and passed on genealogically from generation to generation. Thus, under primordialism, ethnic identity is fixed across time". Individuals born into particular belief systems with different identities may be prone to conflicts and confrontations. Chi (2016) further argues that under primordialism, ethnic distinctions are deeply rooted in ancestral origins and cannot be reconciled. Consequently, ethnic conflicts are bound to emerge from long-standing animosities between groups, fueled by a shared fear of domination, displacement, or even annihilation. Moreover, this approach evaluates ethnicity as a mutual sense of group identity that is natural and deeply rooted in human psychology and social relations (Hashmi, 2016). It has less to do with politics. Under primordialism, ethnicity is deeply aligned with intangible elements rooted in biological, historical and traditional aspects that bind individuals to a large group. Moreover, ethnic mobilisation catalyses group solidarity and support, being emotional and often irrational concepts (Stack, 1986). Chi (2016) states, "As a function of common blood shared within each ethnic group, primordialists anticipate hospitality and cooperation among members of the in-group and hostility and conflict against out-groups". It is also believed that a society where social solidarity, related to gender, labour or class, becomes weak may give space for ethno-religious mobilisation to penetrate political life (Hashmi, 2016). Many times, this perspective overlooks diversity, inter-sectarian cooperation and the political circumstances that shape as well as influence identity dynamics (Majed, 2023). The literature on Primordialism claims that sectarian identities are so ingrained in sectarianism that they take precedence over other types of identities (Valbjorn, 2020).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, it can be said that from etymological origins to their modern manifestation, the concepts of sect and sectarianism have continuously been evolving over time. Individual scholars' preferences and new interdisciplinary research also matter in broaching and adding new meanings to conceptual studies. The shift in terminological meanings reflects that the concepts originated as mere beliefs have become tools of power and disunion, and tend to appear as an enigma for almost all religions at large. Hence, the meaning is overturned from positive to negative in sense. Split, hate, polarisation, antagonism, intolerance, discrimination, prejudice, etc., are the main vocabulary that have crept into the modern scholarly works to define and explain these phenomena; consequently, the modern concept is not synchronised with the historical version.

Today, these connotations are professed as religio-political phenomena with distinctive identity mobilisation, conflict and violence features. Encyclopedic and lexicon definitions are cases in point. Moreover, findings of this study reveal that these terminologies are not only related to the sociology of religion but also influenced by the political sociology of religion. On this premise, they are considered multi-dimensional and multi-faceted phenomena as various interrelated factors shape their dynamics. Hence, a comprehensive approach is essential to understand the anatomy and morphology of sect and sectarianism.

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