

Contribution to Pakistan Studies

My paper contributes to the field of Pakistan studies by deepening our understanding of the relationship between nationalist identity and religious discourse. Focusing on the Deobandi clerical establishment in Pakistan, the paper investigates why Muslim traditionalists insist on wearing outward markers of religious identification. Why do they conflate judgments of character and moral responsibility with one's sartorial choices? A secular reading of this insistence on visible forms of religiosity might perceive it as a kind of narcissism of minor difference. The paper argues, however, that these gestures of religious self-fashioning function in a larger representational economy in which the aesthetic dimension of ritual indexes religious identity while also creating boundaries of social distinction. In classifying the entire sartorial repertoire of pious personhood as a "Muslim's uniform," the Deobandis have effectively reconfigured the behavioral ideology of religious ritual by appropriating a nationalist logic of symbolic identification. Ironically, while this sensitivity towards visible and publicly accessible forms of religious piety sparks outrage over the seductive aesthetics of capitalist marketing and its Western cultural accretions, it blinds Deobandis towards habits of consumerism and stealth varieties of profit maximization promoted by their investiture in Islamic finance. In sum, the paper deploys textual and anthropological analysis to delineate the shifting contours of public religion in Pakistan. Moreover, it highlights the struggles of a Pakistani clerical establishment in negotiating the cultural interface between capitalist modernity and religion.