Abstract:
This talk will examine the role of food in the symbolisms of power and status in the Mughal Empire. I intend to examine the channels through which food symbolisms were conveyed, and how these may be interpreted within the context of imperial legitimisation and expressions of social rank. I shall argue that the evolution of imperial articulations of power by successive emperors of the Mughal Empire was accompanied by distinctive shifts in food customs and feasting traditions. Ideas about food also occupied a key place in ideologies of imperial legitimisation. I will analyse the manner in which the attempts to assert a stronger imperial presence under Akbar led to changes in food articulations at the Mughal court. I will show that these changes engendered a separation of food spaces between the genders, as well as the development of stricter and more circumscribed forms of food etiquette and feasting customs. All these were aimed at placing the person of the Mughal emperor above the other notables of the realm. I will also demonstrate the manner in which these imperial food articulations may be read in the urban spaces of Mughal cities.