In the complex political landscape of the Indian subcontinent in the 16th and 17th centuries, portraits did more than simply convey a likeness of the sitter. They were produced at the court but then were disseminated to different markets and were exchanged as part of the course of diplomacy. Therefore, they served to also convey important aspects of the subject’s ethnic identity, political affiliations and cultural aspirations.

This talk will examine portraits of the monarchs and courtiers of the Deccan Sultanates of Central India, looking at how the backgrounds, clothing and various ‘props’ included in the painting all served to reinforce a certain image of the person depicted.