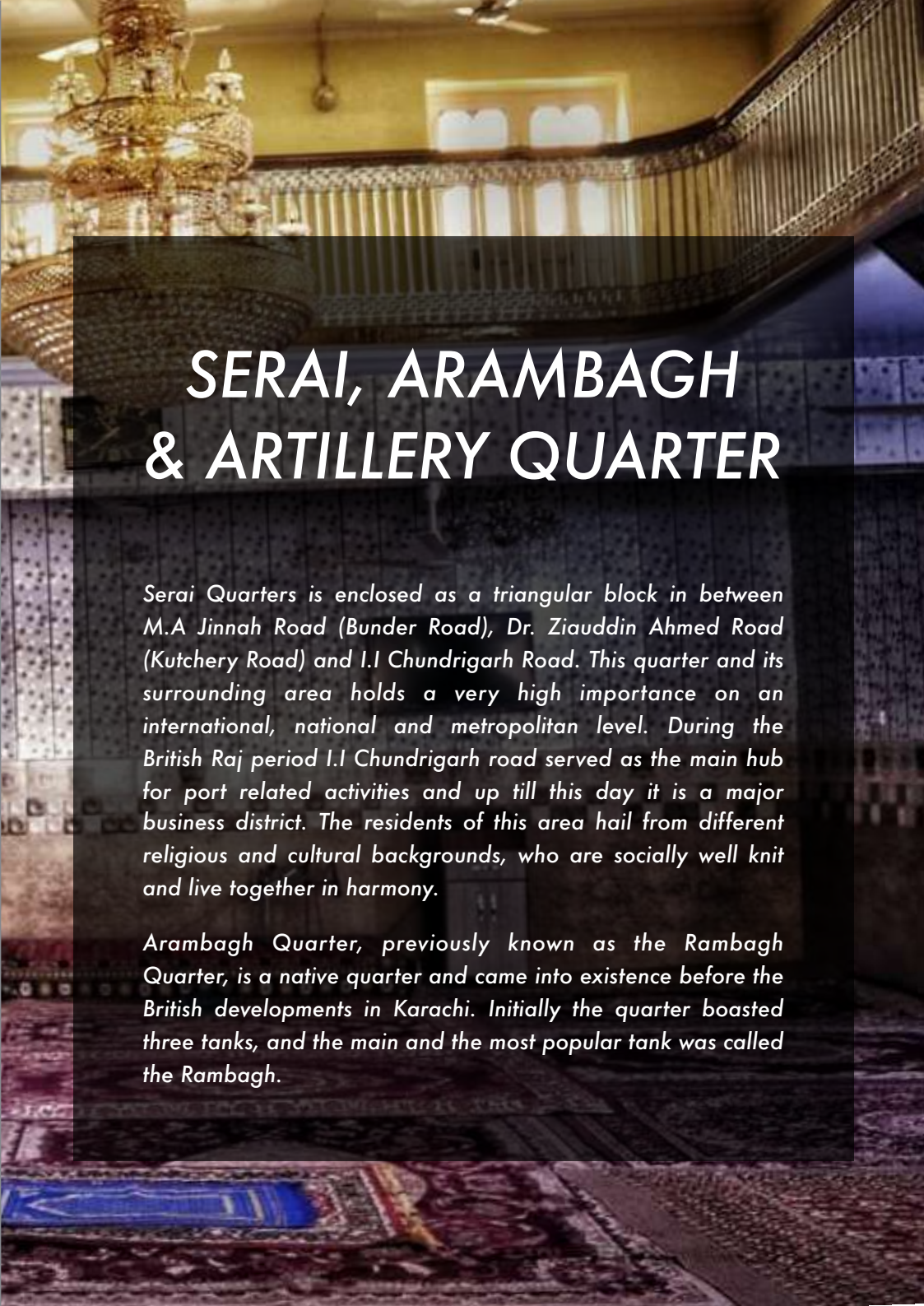




SACRED

SERAI, RAMBAGH
& ARTILLERY QUARTER



SERAI, ARAMBAGH & ARTILLERY QUARTER

Serai Quarters is enclosed as a triangular block in between M.A Jinnah Road (Bunder Road), Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road (Kutchery Road) and I.I Chundrigarh Road. This quarter and its surrounding area holds a very high importance on an international, national and metropolitan level. During the British Raj period I.I Chundrigarh road served as the main hub for port related activities and up till this day it is a major business district. The residents of this area hail from different religious and cultural backgrounds, who are socially well knit and live together in harmony.

Arambagh Quarter, previously known as the Rambagh Quarter, is a native quarter and came into existence before the British developments in Karachi. Initially the quarter boasted three tanks, and the main and the most popular tank was called the Rambagh.



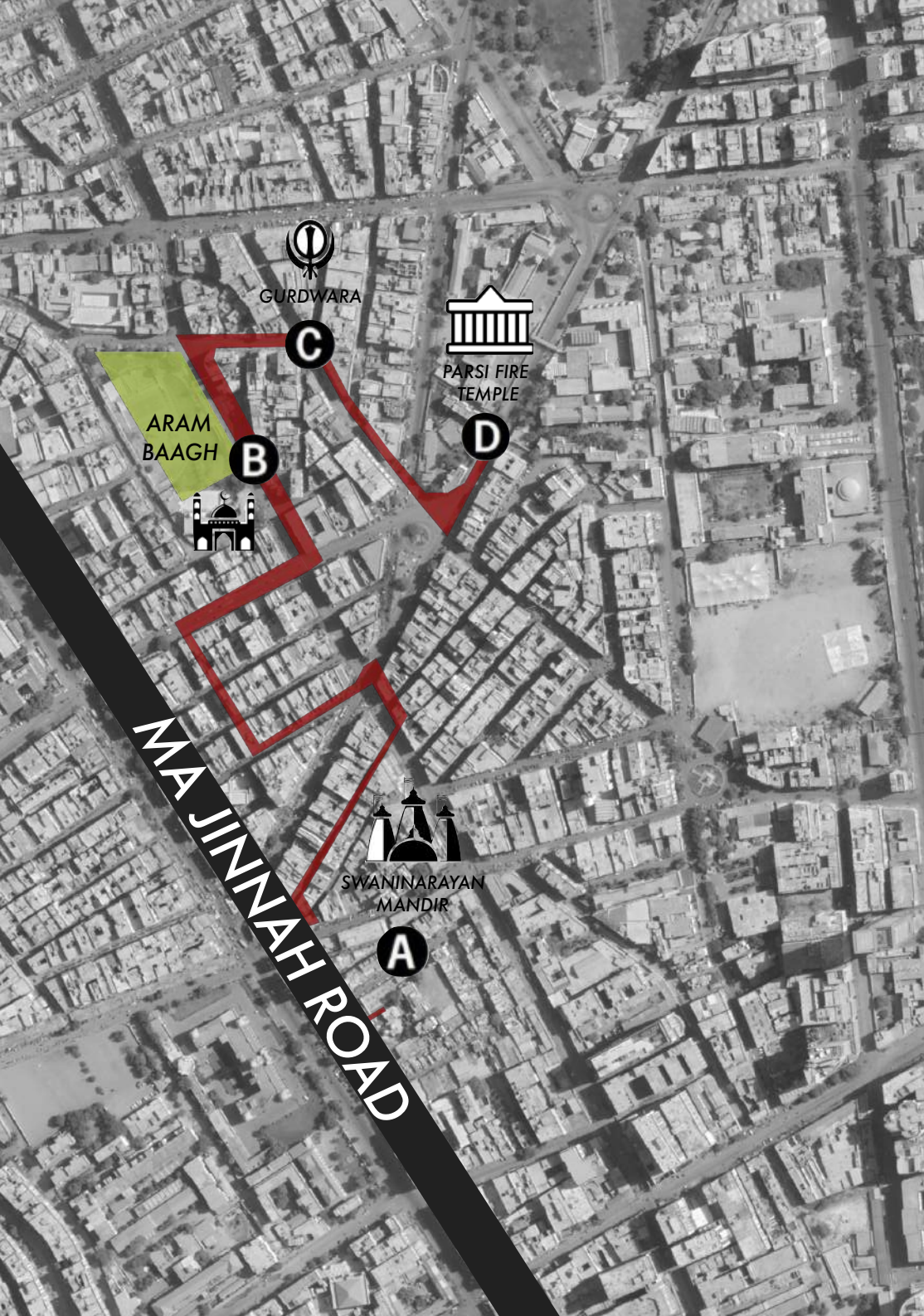
SERAI, RAMBAGH & ARTILLERY QUARTER

There is also a folklore regarding this area that Ram and Seeta stopped here for one night before their pilgrimage to Hinglaj. Which is why this area used to have a lot of temples up till sometime after the partition. The Hindu Community used to live here due to the obvious religious significance.

Artillery Quarter was first a large open ground which served as a rifle practice range and parade ground during the British Raj and therefore labeled as "Artillery Maidan". It served as a residential area and as a space for artillery practice. Buildings such as the High Court, Sindh Assembly and Frere Market have existed in this quarter since 1906.

SACRED TRAIL

SERAI, ARAMBAGH & ARTILLERY QUARTER



Prepare to embark on a unique journey that will help you explore the rich cultural and religious landscape of the Serai and Arambagh quarters in Old Town, Karachi. Begin your journey by visiting the Hindu Colony across the street from the KMC building, which retains the peaceful aura of a place that is greater than the sum of its colourful, fragmented parts. The colony hosts a variety of small, beautiful living quarters, painted in vibrant colours. Take some time to walk around and explore the colony until you come across the magnificent **(A) Swami Narayan Mandir**. This Hindu temple is notable for its size and frontage, occupying over 32,000 square yards. The temple is open to people from all faiths, and is also notable for hosting many Muslim visitors, which speaks volumes about the extent of religious harmony in the Hindu Colony. In order to get a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage of Hinduism, the best time to visit the Swami Narayan Mandir would be during the festival of Janmashtami, which is observed to celebrate the birthday of the Hindu Lord Krishna. The celebration symbolises the victory of good over evil and the arrival of Krishna on earth, to purify the land from all evils. This festival is definitely a must-visit attraction for people who are new to the area, and it takes place in the first week of September, commenced by the sound of bhajans (religious songs). Immerse yourself in the spirit of Janmashtami and allow yourself to become part of the cultural landscape, as such a unique expression of religious identity is rare to find anywhere else in Karachi.

As you exit the Mandir, you can witness the residents of the Hindu Colony going about their business, as people visit the Mandir to perform their daily religious rituals and women clad in sarees dry papars on charpais (a light bead stand made of rope, woven on the timber). As you continue walking around the colony, you will notice various shops selling jewellery, ritual bells, agar battis, bindis and other spiritual ornaments used in Pooja (worship), as well as a vegetarian restaurant. There is an atmosphere of utmost serenity, as the Hindu colony serves as a safe space that allows people from different communities to come together and coexist in harmony. On your way towards the posterior side of the colony, you will pass a gaao-shala (a space where the cows are kept and fed) and an open field that serves as a convening ground for the community. Continue walking down the broad alley in the colony as it becomes narrower and the houses along the path become smaller. You will find a small mandir of Kali Mata on your right in the narrow alley, where the residents of the surrounding area will welcome you with the utmost hospitality.



Sit down to have a chat with them as they narrate compelling accounts about the transformation of the Hindu Colony after partition, before making your way towards the Botal Gali (bottle alley) outside the colony.

Botal Gali is one of the oldest and most renowned alleys in Saddar, tucked away in the heart of the Old Town area. Prepare to walk down a street that opens up into a completely different world, occupied by colonial buildings reminiscent of the architectural splendour of the pre-partition era. Further down the alley, you will discover a row of fascinating shops showcasing a variety of colourful and beautifully carved second-hand bottles for sale, which is what the street is famous for. Immerse yourself in the overpowering fragrances of itr (perfume) floating through the air, rising from the perfume bottles stacked on glass counters in the shops. As you step into one of the older shops, you will find yourself transported back in time as you pass the crumbling wooden shelves showcasing antique glass bottles. Passing by the row of shops along Botal Gali will make you feel as if you are walking through history: witnessing the transformations that the alley experienced; observing the emergence of newer shops trying to fit into a landscape that reminisces the area's more glorious past. Before leaving Botal Gali, give yourself sufficient time to properly experience the spirit of the area - reflect on its captivating history and observe the cultural protocols of the space that make it so special for its inhabitants.

As you exit Botal Gali, continue the path towards **(B) Aram Bagh** (Garden of Relaxation) - a park built in 1939, which retains an aura of nostalgia for its former splendour and historical significance. Settle down in a quiet spot in the garden to reflect on the area's momentous history, and allow yourself to become part of the serene landscape. Listen to the gentle breeze blowing and watch the pigeons gracefully soaring through the sky before slowly descending to the ground to search for food. After 1947, the garden became home to thousands of Muslim refugees who had fled from India, and its name was changed to Aram Bagh, to mark the end of their arduous journey to Pakistan. Having given yourself enough time to ponder over the area's rich historical background, continue treading along the path until you come to the end of the garden and make your way towards the **(C) Gurdwara** - a place of worship that holds immense religious and sentimental value for the Sikh community.



As you enter the Gurdwara, remember to take your shoes off and cover your bare head to respect the sanctity of the sacred place. Walk straight through the narrow pathway into a wide white-marbled yard where you will find the entrance to the prayer room, which is a wooden door with word 'God' intricately etched onto the glass. There is a small podium installed in one side of the room and a red mat spread across the floor. The evenly spaced pillars and the majestic chandelier in the heart of the prayer room further add to the grandeur of the Gurdwara. Immerse yourself in the tranquil silence of the space and reflect on how many people have walked through the same corridors looking for a place to contemplate on the fleeting nature of life, wanting to have a communion with the higher power.

From the Gurdwara, you will move towards the **(D) Parsi Fire Temple** facing Pakistan Chowk, inside the Parsi Colony, which is quite serene and peaceful compared to the busy streets outside. You will see the majestic symbol of Ashofarovar, commonly known as Faravahar, engraved on the temple's wall; this is believed to cast evil spirits away. The square white-walled temple adds calmness and composure to the entire landscape. You will observe a small garden while treading along the path through the colony. The ideal time to visit the temple is during Nauroz (on 21st March) when the entire community gathers to perform rituals to welcome the blessings of the new year.

The Fire Temple serves as the perfect end to the Sacred Trail, as it concludes your journey by reminding you of the interconnectedness of all life forms, allowing you to tune in to your emotions and immerse yourself into the atmosphere of utmost peacefulness.



WALK

60 - 120 MINS

KM

SACREDTRAIL.PLACES



SWAMI NARAYAN MANDIR

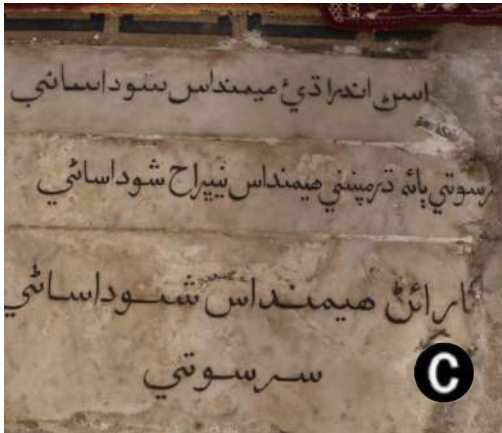
The 160-year-old, Swami Narayan Temple is situated right across the street from the KMC Building. The Mandir serves as an important landmark on the M.A Jinnah road. This temple dates back to the pre-Partition era and is said to be constructed by the followers of Shri Swami Narayan, an ascetic. The Mandir is usually open throughout the day but closes around 4pm. The walls of the Mandir are light brownish and cream colored which gives a very pre-modern touch to its landscape despite the multiple renovations. The Mandir is a Radha-Krishna temple, but there are smaller temples of other deities within the complex. A gurdwara stands right next to the compound. The gurdwara has white colored walls, glazed doors and windows on which the word 'God' is inscribed. The element of religious inclusivity and harmony can be seen within the structure of the colony where majority of the people belong to the Hindu Community.



ARAM BAGH MOSQUE

Aram Bagh masjid is located right beside the Aram Bagh park which was previously called Ram-Bagh. Before partition, Ram-Bagh served as a sacred garden which hosted the Ram Chandur Temple, hence this location held utmost spiritual significance for the Hindu community. After the divide, the temple situated in it was left unsupervised and abandoned. The architecture of the Aram Bagh masjid is breathtakingly beautiful, with its domes, minarets and an expansive yard. The masjid serves as a landmark for the Aram Bagh park. The park is a home for those who don't have one. Along the fence of the park, there are vendors and hawkers selling food and fruits adding to the liveliness of the place. Although much of the location's fascinating heritage has now been erased from people's memories, the garden is still one of the last vestiges of the Hindu society that once formed the cultural fabric of the area.

SACRED TRAIL PLACES



GURDWARA

The magnificent Gurdwara with its white and yellow-orange walls stands tall as the embodiment of tranquility. Constructed in 18th century, this Gurdwara has a fascinating story to narrate about its resistance against the political disagreements of stake holder groups. As you walk into the prayer area, you will be completely captivated by its glory. You will notice an array of religious symbols engraved on different surfaces in the room, including a beautiful inscription on the white floor.



PARSI FIRE TEMPLE

This 150-year-old sacred space has chambers containing two kinds of fires which have been burning since the time of the temple's existence. It is believed that the fires protect people from evil spirits which have been competing against the forces of good, since the beginning of time. Fire represents the light and wisdom of God, Ahura Mazda, to whom sandalwood is offered by the believers as part of their daily ritual. While the only people allowed inside the temple are the Parsis themselves, anyone can visit its outskirts and look at the symbols inscribed on the entrance to the sanctified compound. The Parsi community resides in the area surrounding the temple, consisting of approximately 800 people, adding to the significance of religious coexistence in Old Town Karachi.



SACREDTRAIL.PEOPLE



VIJAY MAHRAJ SWAMI NARAYAN MANDIR

"I've heard that at the time of partition there were approximately 425 mandirs in Pakistan. Unfortunately, that number has now dropped to 20-40 and this is one of the oldest temples standing in all its glory since the 1850's. There used to be a Mandir which looks very similar to this one, but since there were not a lot of people living in the vicinity it was not preserved. My father, Maoji Mahraj moved to this area approximately 90 years ago. I was born here in this colony and have been regularly taking part in the festivities of the mandir, while also taking care of it. This colony served as a Daramshala during partition. Although temples are open to all religions, cultures and castes, this mandir was built by the followers of Swami Narayan as a place of worship and welfare for the poor. This mandir is dedicated to our God, 'Radha Krishna' who holds the ultimate power in the Hierarchy of Gods. All of the residents of the colony, including myself love to celebrate events and festivals of different religions and cultures. In our religion we observe "Bhim Eka Dashir" a fasting period which lasts for 2 nights. We all gather in the ground behind the mandir and break the fast together. Last month, on 25th December, the whole community gathered to cut a Christmas cake and commemorate the birth of Jesus Christ."



SACREDTRAIL.PEOPLE



MR SANTOSH . SWAMI NARAYAN MANDIR

"My family has been residing in this colony for more than 70 years now. There was a lot of diversity here, as many Muslim families shared the same space with a Hindu majority, until recently. Most of them have left the colony except for one or two families, who have been living here for more than a hundred years. This colony now houses Gujrati Hindus, Sindhi Hindus, Marathi Hindus etc. Initially this colony had buildings which weren't very concrete, however majority of the homes have been renovated and are well-built now. The community is very flexible; it is not the people who have hatred in their hearts, it is the politics of the powerful, which was the cause of all hostility. Our celebrations are not restricted only to Hindu festivals."



HIRA SINGH . GURDWARA

"I am a lawyer by profession, but I attribute all my success and the success of my children to Allah. In a recent legal battle, I defended this Gurdwara to help the people of my community get a safe space of their own and freely practice their religion. I feel women are the key to prosperity, God has blessed them with so much willpower and intelligence that I feel it is always important to respect them, no matter the circumstances. I have both daughters and sons but I made it a point that I do not discriminate between them and give them the freedom to choose whatever they like and want to do with their lives. While I agree that a person should adapt to modern times, I also try keeping a balance and incorporate the living habits of my forefathers."



TEAM PLAYGROUND
Center for Transdisciplinarity, Design & Innovation
at Habib University, Karachi.

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