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## Rajnagar Marble: a prominent heritage stone from Rajasthan, India

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Rajnagar Marble, occurring around Rajnagar and Kankroli towns in Rajsamand district of south-central Rajasthan make up the largest marble deposits in India. Rajnagar Marble belongs to late Paleoproterozoic Aravalli Supergroup. It is mostly white, coarse-grained and compact dolomitic marble. Mining is currently being carried out at several, small to medium-sized, open quarries using both conventional and mechanized operations. Although the Rajnagar Marble has been extensively used in archaeological monuments for centuries, it received recognition since the construction of spectacularly carved embankment (Nau-Chowky) of the Lake Rajsamand built during the period 1662-1676 CE. Its use has been recorded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century Eklingji Temple and numerous other temples in Udaipur and vicinity. Besides temples, embankments, step-well constructions, Rajnagar Marble was preferred for carving of idols of various Hindu deities, including the famous 12<sup>th</sup> century Palasma 7-horse drawn chariot Sun idol with nine planets revolving around it. But use of this Dev-Patthar (God's Stone), was avoided for flooring and private dwellings of humans in keeping with the Hindu mythological beliefs. Hence for the residential buildings, Rajnagar Marble was popularly used as a unique ground-in-hand-mill-and-sieved-through-muslin-sieve marble powder-lime paste (~100-micron size) to give the walls, pillars, lanterns, or even floors the "marble-finish". An intangible heritage process typical and unique of the erstwhile Rajputana. Most palaces and havelies of Mewar area, including the five palaces of Udaipur namely, the City Palace Complex, Jagniwas (now the Taj Lake Palace Hotel), Jag Mandir, Lakshmi Vilas Palace and the Sajjangarh (Monsoon Palace) were all built partly in Rajnagar Marble stone, but mostly with marble powder-lime paste finish on lime-sand-quartzite masonry works. Numerous architectural sites such as Moti Mahal, embankments of Fateh Sagar Lake and Rajsamand Lake, Eklingji Temple, Jagdish Temple, Saheliyon-ki-Badi, cenotaphs of the Royal family members at Ayad (1620 CE onwards) were built of Rajnagar Marble.

The low water absorption, high bulk density and high compressive, shearing and tensile strength of the Rajnagar Marble, and its 'blockability' made it technically suitable for monuments that have sustained for five centuries or more, with no signs of weathering and discoloration. The Rajnagar Marble entered the global market in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century with its export to various countries

including the Middle East and Japan. At present, it is extensively used in building and handicraft industry and is also famous for contemporary artworks. In light of these variety of applications of the Rajnagar Marble, we propose 'Rajnagar Marble' for the designation of **'Global Heritage Stone Resource'**.