Introduction
Stone worship, being one of the primitive forms of ‘Nature Worship’, found all over the world even today. The savage people had imposed magic-quality on stones of different shapes and sizes. However, they worshiped and adored the stones as their protector. Not in primitive days alone, stone worship has become a regular practice of many religious and cultural sects of India even in today.

Shaligram Shila Worship in West Bengal
In West Bengal, we are familiar with the phenomenon that different types of Shalgram shila are worshiped in most of the temples followed by Vaisnaba order. I made an attempt to do a case study on the worship of Shaligram Shila in Jagannath Bari temple in the village Handla Blabhadrapur (West Midnapur, West Bengal, India). The Shila was enshrined on the top of Sri Jagannath’s Ratna Sinhashana. The priest of the temple explained that the Hindus worship the Shaligram Shila and consider it as the divine manifestation of Lord Vishnu. This Shila having 5 layers of spokes, almost depicts the pattern of Chakra of Vishnu. So that, this special characteristic of this stone (Shila) let people to imagine that, this was the representation of Vishnu in the form of Shila.

Rites and Rituals of the Worship of Shalgram Shila
The Shalgram Shila possesses a dignified position in the temple. There are many Taboos relating to this stone. No body is allowed to touch the stone excepting the Brahmins (Priest). And the priest must put on clean cloath when he touches the the stone. The Priest offers fruits and sweets to Shalgram as a token of their service to Lord Vishnu.

A Comparative Study between Salgram and a Fossil
Now, I would like to draw your attention to another fossil (Dactylioceras ammonite belonging to Jurassic period, about 170 million years old) for making comparison. This is the photo of a fossilized creature, presently extinct, called Ammonite. By comparing the two photos of Salgram Sila and this Ammonite fossil, we can jot down the following similarities -
1. The number of coils found in both the stones is 5.
2. The same looking spokes are present on the outer surface of the stones.
3. The shape and size of the stones are almost similar.
4. The original colour of the Salgram sila is not properly exposed due to the layer of Sandal paste on it. Otherwise, the colour of both stones would seem same.
On basis of the above similarities, it would be possible to count that both the stone objects speak of the same category. That is why we could say that this Shalgram Shila, which has
been enshrined and worshiped by a specific community, is basically a fossil, most probably of Ammonite.

**About Ammonite**

According to the scientists, the Ammonites were the group of marine creature probably lived in the bottom water of ancient seas. At present, they belong to the extinct groups of animal. It has been proved that they were alive about 250-400 millions years ago, between early Jurassic and late Cretaceous periods. The name 'ammonite' originates from the Greek Ram-horned god - *Ammon*. An imaginary picture of ammonite and some scientific information about it is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Animallia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phylum</td>
<td>Mollusca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Cephalopoda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subclass</td>
<td>Ammonioidea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order</td>
<td>Ammonitida</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ammonites are mostly found on rocks where no life is found. Often, the hard shell of the animals had left the exact impression of its coiled horn on the slit of rocks and sometimes the animal itself became fossilized after various bio-chemical changes through millions of years.

**Cultural Dimension of the Ammonite fossil: The Shalgram Shila**

The study of fossil is not to be limited within the domain of marine-science but it may be treated as an object of folklore and cultural study. In medieval Europe, fossilized ammonites were thought to be petrified, and were called "snakestones". More commonly in medieval England, the stones were adored as "serpentstones". In America, the Blackfoot called Ammonites *insikim* or buffalo stones because they look like sleeping bison. They were used in spiritual ceremonies. Apart from Zoological interest the cultural tradition of stone worship in India, also incorporates the cultural aspect of a stone or fossil.

In Hindu Scriptures, we could hear the mythical resonance behind this special type of stones that should be treated as Shaligram Shila. According to the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, Lord Maha Vishnu states that He would become a stone and would always live on the banks of the Gandaki River. According to the *Gautamio Tantra* the holy stones found by the river Gandaki are known as Shaligram Shila. The Hindus considered some stone found by the bank of Gandaki as Shalgram, which contains features like spokes, spirals and other holy signs. Usually, these spokes are supposed to be the coils of Ammonite’s horn having similarity with the Sudarshan Chakra of Vishnu or Narayan.

**Conclusion:**

Before concluding this article, one question should be raised that, are all Shalgram Shila basically the Ammonite fossil or the impression on stone? We are not in a position to answer this question without making any indepth and interdisciplinary study. This paper is just an attempt to say that the Shalgram Shila which we have found in our case study must be a rare fossil of Ammonite. And I would like to throw light on this issue from the point of folkloristic. This paper also wants to draw the attention of the reader to the fact that the fossil of an extinct creature is being preserved by some folk rituals along with some religious values.