

# Namaste—"I bow to the divine in you"

Raman Sharma\*, Ashok Kumar, Vipin Koushal

With the recent upsurge of COVID-19, efforts are being made worldwide to target this coronavirus with certain specific target medication and millions and millions of dollars are being spent to curb this menace. Whereas, literature has stated that in all the reported major coronavirus outbreaks (SARS, MERS) preventive measures like hand hygiene, cough etiquettes, social distancing, personal protective measures, environmental cleaning have played an important role.<sup>1-3</sup> Besides these measures 'Namaste' an Indian cultural salutation, a way practiced to greet each other is being given a lot of importance and recognition worldwide and is being opted as a measure to avoid contact, maintain hand hygiene and social distancing towards each other.

'Namaste' (or 'Namaskar' or 'Namaskaram') is a common cultural verbal salutation practiced, primarily in Indian subcontinent, since ages. The term 'Namaste' has been derived from two Sanskrit words; 'namah' meaning 'bow', 'obeisance', 'adoration' or 'reverential salutation' and 'te' connotes 'to you'.<sup>4,5</sup> And, the gesture 'Namaste' epitomizes that there is a divine spark in each ones heart chakra i.e an salutation of ones soul by another. While greeting Namaste, one bows slightly with hands folded together, fingers pointing upwards in front of the chest. When the hand position is higher, above one's head, signifies the utmost respect or reverence. In Hinduism, Namaste has a spiritual importance connoting that "the divine and self (soul) is same in you and me". Henceforth, meaning of 'Namaste' states 'I bow to you' or 'divine within me greets the divine in you'.<sup>6,7</sup> Holly Oxhandler, a sociologist has stated that 'Namaste' signifies "the sacred in me recognizes the sacred in you".<sup>8</sup> In the Rigveda, a Hindu scripture, *Namas-krita* (*Namaskar*) has the sense of "worship, adore", whereas '*Namaskara*' in the Atharvaveda, the *Aitareya Brahmana*, the *Taittiriya Samhita* and in other numerous Hindu texts connotes "exclamatory adoration, homage, salutation and worship".<sup>9</sup> In the Vedic literature, various ancient and medieval era sculptures and post-Vedic texts (Mahabharata), it is countenance of worship, veneration, reverence, an "offering of homage" and "adoration".<sup>10</sup>

Besides 'Namaste', handshake a common way of greeting, also represents as a symbol of greeting or departure, respect, reconciliation, congratulations or good sportsmanship. Beyond its interpersonal

significance, this handshake also has the potential to transmit infections directly between individuals.<sup>11</sup> It is a proven fact that handshake does transmit pathogens and one simple handshake transfers at least 124 million live organisms on an average.<sup>12</sup> Studies have also reported that around 80% of individuals retain some disease-causing micro-organisms even after hand washing. Besides this, there are many different ways practiced worldwide to express greetings towards each other; bowing, a kiss on the cheek, fist bumping, elbow bump, hand wave (using an open palm), Thai wai, Japanese bow and clapping greeting in Zambia. Footshake-tapping your shoes against someone else is another creative way of greeting each other. These greeting are always seen as a vital part to respectfully greet each other, but now these greeting habits are quickly changing in consideration of others. The adaptations such as fist bumping, elbow bumping, feet touching are discouraged as they do not allow distancing between "greeters".

Henceforth, out of all these behavioural changes, prompted by this current COVID-19 crisis, the entire world is taking up the habit of 'Namaste'. Worldwide leaders as well as Proponents of the 'Namaste' greeting have shown a great urge to Indian 'Namaste'; one of the best way to keep coronavirus at bay in the present scenario.

## CONCLUSION

'Namaste' a cultural salutation has emerged as an important measure for limiting the coronavirus spread and the same needs to be adopted, promoted and implemented worldwide through widespread media and educational programs.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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### History

- Submission Date: 09-10-2020;
- Revised Date: 09-01-2021;
- Accepted Date: 01-02-2021;

DOI : 10.5530/ijmedph.2021.1.12

### Article Available online

<http://www.ijmedph.org/v11/i1>

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**Cite this article :** Sharma R, Kumar A, Koushal V. Namaste—"I bow to the divine in you". *Int J Med Public Health*. 2021;11(1):63-4.

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**Cite this article :** Sharma R, Kumar A, Koushal V. Namaste—"I bow to the divine in you". Int J Med Public Health. 2021;11(1):63-4.