CONCLUSION:

Hinduism is the religion of the Hindus. It is not founded by a Saint or a Prophet like any other religion. It is a revealed religion in the world. Hinduism is one of the Ancient religion of the World. The original name of Hinduism is ‘Sanatana Dharma’ which means ancient ethics. The very name, ‘Hinduism’ was given to the religion of the people of Hindustan by foreigners.

The Sruthi and Smiriti are the twin authentic sources and fundamental Scripture of Hinduism. The Vedas are spoken of as Sruti. that is heard or revealed. Smriti lays down laws for individuals and for society. Smriti means the things remembered or learned. Manu Dharma Shastras or the laws governing righteous conduct come under Smriti.

According to Gandhi, human beings are sparks of the divine power. He believes that moksha as the only goal of human life. For him moksha means realization of Truth; that is seeing God face to face. By serving the people Gandhi wished to see the God. Especially he wished to serve the weakest of the weaker section of the society. That is the reason why he wished to remove untouchability from the society.

In India the most popular term for Religion is Dharma. Literally Dharma connotes that which has to be ‘adhered to’. Religion is practical aspect of philosophy, which is rational aspect of all religions. Hindu religion is a way of life. It governs all the development of Hindu-life. Religion is basically associated with a code of morality, creed, and culture.
Gandhi believed that, “By religion I do not mean formal religion or customary religion but that religion which underlies all religions”\(^2\). He was believer of Adishankara’s teachings of Advaita (Monism). He himself advocated, “the essential unity of God and Man for that matter of all that lives”. And he believed that, “I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find him apart from the rest of community”.

The most significant feature of Gandhi’s Religion, that “Truth is God’ is thus, the expression of a comprehensive vision of reality; it is essentially a religion of service for him. Religion or spirituality is not a mere matter of knowing scriptures and engaging in philosophical discussions. For him, true spirituality is practical application of spiritual values in actual life.

In Gandhi’s thought Ahimsa (Non-violence) is a positive virtue of expressing selfless love towards living creatures which is the true expression of consciousness of absolute unity of all living being. Ahimsa and Truth is really not a new ideal developed by Gandhi, Both virtues are ancient Hindu ideal. He said, “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and Non-violence are as old as the hills”. Truth is permanent existence. Truth alone exists, while everything else is changing. Truth is the absolute spiritual reality behind the relative moral world. Satyagraha lies in the practical expression of Truth and Ahimsa. Self-purification is another name for Satyagraha.

Gandhi, who called himself a ‘Sanatana Hindu’ gave different interpretation to the theory of karma. In the words of Gandhi, “I call myself a Sanatana Hindu, because, I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Purnas and all that goes by the name of Hindu Scriptures and therefore in
Avadars and rebirth”. ‘Karma’ means action and deed. Right conduct gives rise to happy life and wrong deed to misery but all in the same birth.

The ‘Dharma’ is the capsule of virtues which Gandhi stated as the Truth. For him truthful life or a life of non-violence is the right living. In other words, one’s karma is to worship Truth and follow Ahimsa (Non-violence). Another aspect of Hinduism is vegetarianism. This principle recognizes the equality of all life and respect for all beings. As every being has life and feeling, non-killing becomes an essential rule of life. The concept of cow-protection includes the protection of all beings. It is the gift of Hinduism to the world.

According to him, ‘Ramarajya’ (welfare of all) means the kingdom of God on earth or the reign of Truth and Ahimsa in every walk of life. He considers service of God creation as the easiest way to attain God realization. Hence, service to his creation is the service to God.

Following the teachings of Swami Vivekananda Gandhi too considered the service of God incarnates in poor (Daridra Narayanan), and that service is the path of God-realization. He devoted his life time in the selfless service of the poor and the downtrodden people of India. To quote his words, “I want to uplift Hinduism. I regard the untouchables as an integral part of Hindu community. I am pained when I see a single Bhangi (Lower caste) driven of the fold of Hinduism. But do not believe that all class distinctions can be obliterated. I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The Gita teaches us that members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis”³.
In 1933, Gandhi said, that his goal is clear. It was not to have Harijan (Untouchable) as a separate body to Hinduism. And he shall be satisfied with nothing less than complete removal of untouchability⁴.

Gandhi had realized even in his childhood that untouchability was a curse and a blot on Hindu Society. Even as a youngster of 12 years he accidentally touched Uka, his family scavenger, his mother had asked him to wash the hands, but he never accepted the untouchability practiced. Later, he had raised a protest against untouchability. Then while in Durban (South Africa) he was even prepared to send Mrs. Gandhi (Kasturba) away from the house because she would ill treat his untouchable Christian friend Mr. Lawrance.

In 1915 for the first time, even in Sabarmathi Ashram, Ahmedabad, Gandhi had to face a big storm both from the inmates as well as from the caste-Hindus, just because he decided to accept an untouchable family as members of the ashram. Gandhi said, “I will admit untouchables if they wish to join”. The most popular reference is the Adoption of girl child from the same untouchable family. Later he said, “I have adopted an untouchable child ‘Lakshmi’ as my own. I confess I have not been able to convert my wife completely to my view. She cannot bring herself to truth as I do. But I cannot convert my wife by anger; I can do so only by love”. Later in 1933, Gandhi had arranged a marriage tie between a reformed-Hindu Brahmin lad, Maruti and his adopted Harijan daughter, Lakshmi.

Almost throughout his political career in India, he used strong and spiritual attitude on this subject. At the time of his leadership of the Indian National Congress in 1920 (Nagpur) Gandhi insisted and recommended the reform minded Hindus to adopt the ‘removal of untouchability’ as a
constructive programme of congress worker. Gandhi could make ‘anti-untouchability’ campaign as a national cause. In young India he wrote, “Swaraj is unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without the Hindu-Muslim unity”\textsuperscript{5}.

Caste is a rigid social system in which a social hierarchy is maintained generation after generation and allows it little mobility out of the position to which a person is born. The four original four fold system of Varna-castes have been subdivided again and again over many centuries, until today it is impossible to tell their exact number. Estimates rates from 2500 to 3000 different sub-castes established by the caste system throughout India. This being its magnitude Gandhi viewed it differently and so he had said, “Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know, and do not need to know. But, I do know that it is harmful, both to spiritual and national growth”\textsuperscript{6}. Later he wrote, “caste must go, if we want to root and untouchability”\textsuperscript{7}.

Prior to 1931 the intouchables were known in the British Government records as “depressed classes”, In 1935, during British Rule, the untouchable were classified as “Scheduled Caste”. In 1949 the Indian Government outlawed the use of the term ‘untouchables’. The group has been reclassified as the “Scheduled Castes” and has been granted special educational and political privileges.

According to the census of 1961 the population of scheduled castes in 64.5 million in India\textsuperscript{8}. As per the \textbf{Census of India - 2001}, the population of Scheduled Castes is 165,865,545, and the total house holds is 32,526,101.
As per this Census of India 2001, there are 1221 Sub-castes within the Scheduled Castes and 649 Sub-castes within the Scheduled Tribes. It is for this population of scheduled castes, who constitute nearly one-fifth of the total population of the country, Gandhi had spoken and striven, for making them emancipated. Further, the name ‘Harijan’ that Gandhi used to identity this population, was later, used by Gandhi to identify the broader group of ‘all Hindus’.

Ambedkar’s views was that “There will be outcastes as long as there are castes, and nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system”. The real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood alone can create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling… becomes paramount, the separatist feeling – the feeling of being aliens – created by caste will not vanish”.

One of the Gandhian follower, Gora’s view was simple: “This thorn-bush (the caste system) is in our path. It is useless to argue about who put in there, why, and when; the whole thing is against the interest of the people and we must simply remove it”.

Gandhi stood and strived for protecting, Hinduism, that is purged off untouchability. He even declared himself a ‘Sanatanist’ is well known information. But the so-called Hindu organizations, that now claim to protect Hinduism, do not even consider Gandhi’s ideals of caste annihilation and inter-caste marriage. They are in no way interested to promote the reformistic principles of Gandhi. On the contrary, they are interested in strengthening casteism and more or less remain as an obstacle for inter-caste marriage.
Gandhi believed in and foresaw a ‘**Casteless Society**’, which he dreamed could happen after the occurrence of hundreds of thousands of inter-caste marriages. He even substituted one name ‘Harijan’ that will denote all the people of this caste-less society. But the word ‘Harijan’ itself is not in vogue. And it is a banned word in this country, owing to the opposition from the people, that clearly reflects the dilution of the Gandhi’s dream of casteless society.

**Gandhi’s Ideological Shift:**

In 1931 at the time of Round Table Conference, he claimed himself to be the sole representative of the vast mass of the untouchables and disputed with Dr. Ambedkar’s claim to speak for the whole of the untouchables of India.

The untouchables were being treated cruelly, as such untouchability was a cruel and inhuman act perpetrated by caste-Hindus. As an institution, it violates human dignity. It is against the spirit of democracy. There is no doubt that Dr. Ambedkar himself was a victim of this pernicious system of untouchability.

Gandhi has been equated with Dr. Ambedkar. More than that Dr. Ambedkar is projected as the saviour of untouchables. Where as Gandhi is shown as if he was against the interests of untouchables. It is a wrong notion. Only by knowing the reality of Gandhi, one can understand that he had done a lot for untouchables.

In the Round Table Conference held in London in 1931, Dr. Ambedkar pleaded for separation of untouchables form The Hindu Society and urged for recognition of the depressed classes as an independent
community like Muslims. The British Government in its communal Award declaration in 1932 prior to the enactment of Government of India Act of 1935, provided separate electorate for the depressed classes.

In 1932, All India Anti untouchability league was founded in the wake of Gandhi’s epic fast at Yeravada Prison; Pune. It was renamed as the Servants of untouchables society. But it was popularly known by its Hindi translation a Harijan Sevak Sangh. At the beginning the main aim of this organization was to abolish untouchability. The movement devoted itself against untouchability and executed a multi-dimensional attack on the evil of this in-human practice. In 1933 he started his historic All India Harijan tour from Wardha and ended at in Varanasi on 2.8.34. It covered 20,000km, as a result around 600 temples were thrown open to the untouchables. It is a remarkable achievement of Gandhi and it shows the interest and commitment of Gandhi towards the welfare of the weaker section of the society.

Dr. Ambedkar’s view that the problems of the untouchables are economic, social and political as well as religious, that widely prevails even now in India. “During this period of the mid 1940’s that Ambedkar launched this most vitriolic attacks against Gandhi. Dr. Ambedkar wrote, “what Congress and Gandhi have done to untouchables”, first pulished in 1945, contains Ambedkar’s most impassioned criticism”⁹.

**Reasons for calling untouchables as Harijans :**

The earlier names by which they had been called was Anteyaja, depressed, oppressed, Dalita, Adishudra etc. But Gandhi coined the name ‘Harijan’ which means the “Children of God”, at the suggestion of Narasimha Mehta, the great Gujarathi Saint. He had used the word and
said that God is the protector of the helpless. Hence, Gandhi adopted “Harijan” as the name signifying untouchables. The word ‘Harijan’ was spiritual form for untouchables. He believed that, God is the friend of the friendless, help of the helpless, and the Protector of the weak. That is also the reason why he gave the name ‘Harijan’. But today The word ‘Harijan’ is being looked down upon as humiliating and a very wrong interpretation is being put. But Gandhi believed “all are equal in the eyes of God” and he used this word in order to give dignity and honour to the untouchables, those who were despised by the caste Hindus.

Gandhi, in his childhood, used to visit Vishnu temple along with his mother. He had also seen the play of ‘Harichandra’. This drama made a great impact in the young minds of Gandhi, that he then resolved to lead a life like that of ‘Harichandra’. Later, in his married life, he named his first son as ‘Harilal’.

The word ‘Hari’ denotes the other name of Lord Vishnu. In Hinduism three Great Gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are considered as incarnations of creation, protection and destruction respectively. Which, is believed, according to Hindu mythology, they have been doing since eons.

Gandhi, in order to bring the untouchables into the Hindu mainstream society, relieving them from the evil clutches of Varnasharama system and its practice of untouchability, rechristened them as ‘Harijan’. This naming of untouchables as ‘Harijans’ has its base in the Gandhi’s exalted belief and respect he had in the God ‘Vishnu’ also called ‘Hari’ and also in the personality of ‘Harichandra’. Thus he had a divinely interpretation when he chose the term ‘Harijan’. In his conclusive stage he wished the term ‘Harijan’ should be used to refer all ‘caste – Hindus’.
Gandhi used the term ‘Harijan’ to call the untouchables as the ‘Children of God’ and the term ‘Durjan’ to call the caste-hindus as the ‘men of evil’. References drawn from different speeches and writings of him, however give space for the assumption that the word ‘Harijan’ does not have the only meaning ‘Children of God’. He found that the characters and attributes of the Truth and analysed its practice in real life. Among the Hindus, he found the oppressed untouchables leading a life very close to the truth (God). Therefore he called them as Harijans. So the word was not used as an alternative to the word ‘oppressed’ or ‘suppressed’ or ‘dalit’ but as a name connoting ethically advanced people. Those who have not evolved are far from the truth and therefore ‘Durjan’ (Men of evil). The others are called as Durjans and he wanted them to shed un truthful characters and become Harijans. Becoming Harijans for him was a religious reformation.

In 1920 he advocated, “inter marrying, inter dining are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy”. After four years in 1925 he said, “I do not regard inter dinning and inter-caste marriage as essential to the removal of untouchability. I believe in Varna Ashrama Dharma”. Underlying Gandhi’s change (ideological shift) in attitude towards the removal of untouchability and caste.

In 1932, Gandhi accepted and blessed a marriage between his youngest son, Devadass, and a Brahmin girl Lakshmi (daughter of Rajagopalachari). This was the first of its kind of an inter-caste marriage blessed by him, who was, earlier reluctant to do any of this type of marriage.
But at the time of **Agra Conference** (Sept. 1933) Gandhi insisted the constructive workers and passed the following resolution, “inter-caste marriage and inter dining must be on the programme of the Harijan Movement”. At the end of the Harijan Tour (7.11.33 to 2.8.34) he established the Harijan Sevak Sangh for socio-economic and cultural development of the untouchables throughout the country.

Removal of untouchability, Gandhi believed would be a sufficient reformation to bring back glory to Hinduism. Gandhi suggested inter-caste marriages as one of the practical way to remove the practice of untouchability. In his last phase of life, He reserved his blessings only to inter-caste marriages in which one of the partners was a Harijan (Low caste).

Gandhi may have softened the Hindu heart, Ambedkar may have awakened self respect and an interest in politics among untouchables, but economic dependence upon others continues to restrict the upward movement of the untouchables. In 1946, Gandhi declared, “If I had my way I could persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan (untouchable) husbands”. He believed that, “Every mixed marriages will tend in varying degrees to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste known by the beautiful name ‘Bhangi’ that is to say, such a happy day will dawn soon”\(^{10}\). He promoted only such marriages. i.e. pratiloma marriage. His ultimate aim was to make all Hindus to become one caste i.e. Harijan.

According to Gandhi, performing intercaste marriages does not mean that it is necessary to go back to Varnashrama society. On the contrary, he wished to form a casteless society even without Varna
system. Further he insisted on the inter-caste marriages, to create a casteless society within the Hindu community. He declared that, “If I am right in my statement that the regeneration of Hinduism lies in our becoming ‘Harijans’, then it is very clear that a change must be made in the marriage rites in all weddings taking place in the Ashram or the ones with my blessings. Since, I have already agreed, Indu and Tendulkar, should be married in the Ashram” (CWMG, Vol. 81, p.96). He strongly believed that inter-caste marriages as essential for the attainment of Swaraj. In 1933 Gandhi arranged for a marriage between a reformed, Hindu Brahmin named Maruthi and his ‘adopted daughter Lakshmi’ despite her biological father’s reluctance.

In one of his articles in Harijan weekly, he said that, “If I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable; so that, I may share their sorrow, sufferings and the affronts leveled at them in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition – I pray that if I should die with any of my desires unfulfilled, with my service of the ‘untouchable’s unfinished, with my Hinduism unfulfilled, I may be born amongst the untouchables’ to bring my Hinduism to its fulfillment”. This shows his dominant belief and commitment to serve the untouchables.

Gandhi’s concept of inter-caste marriage and its relevance in the modern world is obvious by its percolation up to the present day ‘Matrimonial’ columns. Though all the regional and national level Media and Newspapers do carry classified Matrimonial advertisement on caste basis, they do also carry ‘Caste no bar’ columns, which is a positive trend in this modern society. It is observed that majority of such inter-caste marriages, do happen between any two Harijan sub castes. Only a very meager cases of inter-caste marriages do happen to match the criteria of
Gandhi, that insisted on either of the married party being a Harijan. But a reasonable number of inter-caste marriages do take place among caste Hindus.

Further the people from the higher echelons of bureaucracy and society, to say in the fields of software, civil services, art, literature and media, do least bother for castes at the times of their marriages. Here they give importance only to money and status. An objective analysis of such marriage reveals a sorry state of affairs, that, such marriages are not well-received and encouraged by their family members and the society.

Majority of such marriages or married couples do end up in seeking the support of courts and other law enforcing agencies like police and registrar of marriages etc. Many, such inter-caste marriages are socially boycotted and ostracized by their family and society.

India, a democratic country, that proudly declares Gandhi as the ‘Father of Nation’ is lagging behind in seriously implementing his ideals with regard to inter-caste marriages. Though a few states have announced various welfare schemes to encourage inter-caste marriage, they are not seriously implemented by the respective State Governments. Many States still remain indifferent to such inter-caste marriage promoting measures. The demand for reservation in Government jobs and educational institutions by the inter-caste married people and for their offspring, is still elusive for them and yet to be fulfilled.
Even the States Governments headed by the Communists, who speak deadly against caste and who want a casteless society, have also not taken any positive steps to encourage inter-caste marriages. Everything still remains a ‘lip service’ by these political parties.

Though there seems a glimpse, or ray of hope in this inter-caste marriage scenario, all is not that much to fulfil the dreams of Gandhi. Most of the Gandhian Organization and institutions, that runs into thousands of numbers, they themselves do not practice or promote these Gandhian ideals is a ‘pathetic’ case in point.

Gandhi’s perception was very clear. Caste must go, if we want to remove untouchability in Hinduism. He paved the way for the liberation of the untouchable in India. His revolution embraced the entire Hindu society. Even after 60 years of after his martyrdom, Gandhi is relevant not only in our country, but also in the world, is felt much more than ever before.