(i) General View:

India is a sacred land. It is birth place of numerous sages, seers, saints and many great souls, who have left their foot prints throughout this land. In this way every inch of this land is related to the sacred memory of those great souls (mahātmās). Those saints have given rise to numerous sects within the great religion known as Sanātana Ārya Dharma. Thus, we have so many sampradāyas within this great dharma. Some of which prove dominant factor in Hindu way life. Śaivism, Śaktism and vaishnavism, among many others, are the three well-known and important sects. These sampradāyas have embraced the great population of India.

Among those three, again we find that the Vaishnavaism has been crystallised and there arose numerous sects and sub-sects within it. The vaishnavism can be traced back to the Ṛgvedic hymns (4000 B.C). In the age of the Purāṇas, viṣṇu formed a trinity with Brahmā and Śiva. Brahmā, the originator, viṣṇu the preserver and Śiva the destroyer.
God Viṣṇu is supposed to have descended on earth at least ten times in different garbs, called Matsya, Kurma, Narasimha, Vāmana, Parasurāma, Halirāma, Varāha, Śri Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Buddha. There are crores of followers of these avatāras. Among these, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa are found to be more popular than others. Throughout India they are worshipped with single minded devotion. Our saints have woven their cloth of Bhaktism to wrap the mass people of this land. In the south, Ālvārs preached the Vaiṣṇavism in a peculiar way, side by side with the Pañcarātras. The Pañcarātras have given a system of devotion parallel to the Vedic way of religious practice. Thus, Yāmunācāryya and Rāmānuja preached the Śri Vaiṣṇavism in their own way in the southern states.

So also, when we turn our eyes to Mahārāṣṭra we see there Mahānubhāvas, and the Varkāris emanating from Pandharpur, wherein god Vitthala was worshipped as their tutalary god. Vithobā became household word there. Jñānadeva, Nāmadeva and others preached this neo-Vaiṣṇavism throughout Mahārāṣṭra.

Northern India was also swept by neo-Vaiṣṇava movement in the middle centuries. Rāmānanda, Kabir, Tulasidāsa, Mīrabāi, Narasimha, Mehtā, Maluka Dāsa, Śūradāsa and others were devout Vaiṣṇavas, whose words
touched the heart of common people.

Eastern India was not exception. Caitanya, Caṇḍīdāsa and vidyāpati preached the neo-vaiṣṇavism ardently through Bengal, Orissa and Behar. In Assam, Śrī Harideva, Śankaradeva, Mādhavadeva and Dāmodaradeva took neo-vaiṣṇavism to the household (of the people of Assam). The great Bhaktimovement swept the land everywhere. Śaivism and Śaktism dissipated at the advent of the neo-vaiṣṇava movement. Dāmodaradeva preached worship of Viṣṇu, side by side with age old vedic way of sacrifice etc. The worship of image was practised by him, in contrast with Śankaradeva who banished such worship of images. Much has been said of neo-vaiṣṇavism elsewhere. The sect of Mahāpuruṣiyā has been also subjected to the study. There are numerous works on this subject: Laksmināth Bezbarua (Śankaradeva and Mādhavadeva, 1926), B.K. Baruah (Śankaradeva, Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam, 1960), Ācāryya Manoranjan Śāstri (Asamar vaiṣṇava Darśanara Rūperekhā, 1991), Maheswara Neog (Śankaradeva and His Times, 1965; and Śrī Śrī Śankaradeva, 1987). Satyendra Nath Sarmah (Neo-vaiṣṇava Movement and Sattra Institution of Assam, 1966) have made significant contribution in this field. Such a major attempt is not seen in the case of the Dāmodariyā vaiṣṇavism. Some small works are undertaken by a number of scholars.
Some of the works dealing with Dāmodariyā vaisṇavism may be enumerated below: (1) Deva Dāmodara Guru; by Sonapatī Deva Sarmah (1968); (2) Deva Dāmodara Guru Pravandha, by Naranarayana Deva Goswami (1978); (3) Deva Dāmodara Guru Darśana; by Naranarayana Deva Goswami (1983). Nagendra Narayana Deva Goswami has contributed the following works: (1) Vedavid Guru Dāmodara-deva (1987); (2) Śrī Śrī Deva Dāmodara Guru (1987); (3) Mahāpuruṣa Dāmodara-deva (1985); (4) Bhaktimūrti Deva Dāmodara (1988); (5) Deva Dāmodara Guru Bandanā (1989). Tirthanath Sarmah wrote Āuniāti satrā Buranji (1965) while Benudhar Sarmah dealt with the Dakṣinātṛ sattra. But none has tried to write a treatise on the sect of Dāmodariyā vaisṇavism. Thus, we were prompted to undertake to write a treatise by on this sect.

(ii) Sources:

The sources of our study may be divided into two, (1) Original and (2) Secondary. The history of Vaisnāvism is long one. It originated in the Vedic period. Since then it has come to us through classical period. Thus, the Vedas, proper and other Vedic works, Rāmāyana, Mahābhārata, Purāṇas and Gurucaritas form the original sources. Besides these, we have to go through the works done by modern scholars, which form the secondary or tertiary sources. These are put in the bibliography.
(iii) Method:

For our study we have to collect materials from various sources. Besides the Vedic and post Vedic works, the Itihāsas and the Purāṇas help us to collect the materials. Even we had to depend upon the secondary works also for our study. The collected materials were analysed and classified and put the findings in a synthetic manner. The second chapter of this dissertation bears the survey of such history of the Vaiṣṇavism. We had to give brief account of the topic so as to avoid the bulkyness of the work.

(iv) Hypothesis:

The study of a particular topic for the first time, generally evokes uncertainty in the mind of a researcher. We are not exception to it. Yet we hope that our study of the topic will bring home some results with happy ending.

A true and correct picture of the sect of Dāmodariā Vaiṣṇavism has been delineated here. It has been done with meticulous care. For that end in view we have drawn a planned work to embrace all sides of the topic.

(V) Summary of the work: Besides the regular feature of Introduction, Conclusion, Bibliography etc. , our work bears five chapters. The chapters two to six are the core part of the work.
The second chapter deals with origin and development of Vaisnāvism. Our survey begins from the Vedic period. We have tried to give a picture of Vaisnāvism prevailed in the Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Purāṇa and Pañcarātra Āgama in the days of Ālvārs etc. Our survey runs through the southern Vaisnāvism, Varkāri Sampradāya of Mahārāṣṭra, northern Vaisnāvism and eastern Vaisnāvism including that of Assam.

The chapter three deals with the life and works of Dāmodaradeva. The life and religious activities of the saint has been given with great length. The difference of Dāmodariyā Vaisnāvism from that of Mahāpuruṣiyā Vaisnāvism has also been pointed out.

The fourth chapter deals with sattrā organization of our sect, while chapter five gives philosophy of Dāmodariyā sect which includes Hayagrīva worship, Pañcarātra and neo-Vaisnava thought. The sixth chapter deals with the Dāmodariyā mission of Religious preachings, and further information as to the network of the sattras and religious festivals prevalent in Vaisnava-vāda.

(1),(1) While dealing with our subject we have not drawn any distinction between the two terms — Mahāpuruṣiyā and Mahāpuruṣiā, likewise Dāmodariyā and Dāmodariā.