

caressing of God's body. Gardening, caring for his family, and meditating became the focus of his life.

"The best thing anyone can give to humanity is God consciousness," he told Mukunda Goswami, a devotee friend, in 1986. "But first you have to concentrate on your own spiritual advancement. So in a sense, we have to become selfish to become selfless." In April 1996, he flew to Madras, South India to record an album of traditional Indian songs and mantras with Ravi Shankar. Taking advantage of his proximity to Vrindavan, he met up with devotee friends and they set out for the village where Krishna appeared five thousand years ago. In the sixteenth century, followers of the saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu had developed the holy town and restored its many places of pilgrimage to rustic dignity. By the time of George's visit, the population had reached 35,000 full-time residents, and more than 5,000 temples filled the village's twenty square miles. Some of these temples were five stories tall and featured ornate architecture. Others were barely larger than a hole in the wall, with only enough room for one attendant and a small deity.

On the second day of their pilgrimage, George and his friends walked by a group of singers seated roadside. The lead singer stretched his hand toward heaven. The Gopis — cowherd women — hear Krishna's flute, he sang in Braj, the local language, and run to him in the dead of night. Krishna multiplies himself into an equal number of Gopis so that each Gopi may be happy believing she alone dances with her beloved. In that moment of pleasure, the Gopis become proud and Krishna disappears from their sight and the cowherd women go mad from separation.

George did not speak Braj, but he understood the gist of what the man was singing — sorrow and yearning were universal. Yet there was nothing irreconcilable about the man's sadness, for in the next moment the group broke out into rapid drums and joyous chorus. People stood and danced, hands above their heads, then swooped down executing slow turns, then rose up again with a jump. No one led: the waxing and waning rhythms and spontaneous dance came from intuition. There seemed to be no logical sequence to their actions. This was a display without notation or orchestration and, in that sense, not performance at all — simply hearts drifting on waves of devotion, a song that would never be repeated exactly the same way again.