

## Summary of the Main Discussion

[Lokavidya Debates, 18 Feb 2026]

### Girish

I had shared a longish Summary of earlier discussions in the last three meetings, organized under different headings, and largely relates to shaping a possible VA program. I request you to review it and point out any inaccuracies or misrepresentations. We may begin either with comments on the Summary and previous discussions or by reviewing the Draft Program shared by Sunil, which I can display here.

### Sunil

A quick review during this meeting may not be sufficient. Maybe everyone should carefully read both documents: the Summary and the Draft Program statement. Then we can have a focused discussion to shape a concrete program over the next 2–3 meetings. Everyone can then suggest what is feasible and what is not, enabling a more informed and realistic plan of action.

Today we may talk about either the events around AI, or about global political developments.

### Girish

We may not have followed AI developments since the last time we discussed it at some length. That is one year back. Maybe we can talk about the global events today.

### Suresh

I am fine with any of these two for today. I suggest we take up examining the current international situation and its implications for future directions, particularly in the context of an emerging “new colonialism.” This development results from multiple factors that require analysis—from scientific, social, and broader structural perspectives.

### Sunil

The United States has had limited success in Ukraine and is clearly unwilling to engage in direct war with Russia, reflecting an accepted bipolar or multipolar balance in which Russia and China act as deterrents to U.S. military escalation, including in places like Iran and North Korea. This altered power balance constrains American options and raises doubts about whether the U.S. could sustain or win another prolonged conflict, unlike earlier interventions in Iraq or Afghanistan. There also seems to be a policy shift indicated by the recent U.S. outreach to Europe—highlighted by Rubio’s speech at the Munich Security Conference—signals a retreat from earlier rhetoric associated with Trump-era civilizational-state or multipolar ideas, and a renewed emphasis on transatlantic unity. The venue – Munich – is also significant. Overall it appears doubtful whether the U.S., given these constraints and strategic recalibrations, can realistically open new fronts in regions like Taiwan or Indochina. Deeper structural changes in global power dynamics seem likely.

### **Girish**

The recent U.S. foreign policy statements do not seem to really represent a backtracking from earlier positions. While some commentators interpret recent speeches—such as those at the Munich Security Conference—as signaling a return to tighter American alignment with Europe and renewed dominance, the shift may be more complex. Earlier policy documents already emphasized support for conservative forces in Europe and civilizational rhetoric, so current statements may not mark a clear reversal. Europe’s longstanding reliance on U.S. security and its recent moves to strengthen its own military capabilities further complicate the picture. Although some analysts describe emerging “new forms of American imperialism,” I doubt whether the U.S. can fully reassert dominance, especially given its weakened manufacturing base and the time required for recovery, during which other powers will also advance. Overall, I believe the global order still appears to be moving toward multipolarity rather than a simple return to American hegemony, though the situation remains fluid and requires continued observation.

### **Sunil**

The real issue for us is not whether a unipolar (U.S.-led) or multipolar (Russia–China–aligned) world order will prevail, but whether the debate itself can be reframed to include a third dimension: the local—self-governance, face-to-face communities, and decentralized political forms such as Swaraj. We should work for shifting the global discourse from a binary unipolar-versus-multipolar framework to one that equally recognizes local political autonomy. While Russian thinkers like Dugin and others advocate multipolarity, and American elites appear to tactically engage with both unipolar and multipolar positions, the “local” dimension remains largely absent from mainstream geopolitical debate. Latin American ideas such as the plurinational state are examples of local-oriented politics entering global conversations and we should ask whether similar concepts—like Swaraj—can be articulated globally. Global power struggles overlook local sovereignty, as seen in cases like Cuba, where great powers maneuver strategically but do not fundamentally challenge the marginalization of local self-determination.

The central question is whether locality—ideas such as Swaraj, Mandal, Lokavidya, plurinationalism in Latin America, and regional alliances in Africa—can be inserted into the ongoing global debate between unipolarity and multipolarity. Rather than choosing sides in great-power rivalry, we must aim at reframing the discourse to include locality as an equally important dimension, arguing that doing so could open space for new political formations rooted in self-governance and ordinary life across different regions. Just as earlier debates on “knowledge” created space to introduce the concept of Lokavidya, the current geopolitical contention may offer an opportunity to articulate a new political imagination grounded in local realities. Can we start a deeper dialogue among those engaged with global issues to explore whether such a locality-centered framework can meaningfully reshape global political thinking. We may meet every Wednesday till the Trust Meeting and discuss a program we may adopt for this before the Trust Meeting.

### **GSRK**

Yes we can have weekly meetings to discuss this. But, I would be cautious about overinterpreting recent geopolitical speeches and policy statements. Political rhetoric—whether from the U.S. Secretary of State, Vice President, or Trump—can be inconsistent, strategically crafted, or audience-specific, and may not reflect stable long-term policy shifts. Rather than clarity in moves toward unipolarity or multipolarity, I tend to see fluidity and tactical nature of global politics—for example, the U.S. may not seek direct confrontation with Russia but could aim to strategically “pin down” adversaries like Russia in Ukraine or disrupt China’s global networks. Also Europe is not passive and has its own strategic thinking. So, American positions may shift frequently. I think we need a more flexible and cautious analysis of global power dynamics rather than firm conclusions based on speeches, or placing events neatly into unipolar or multipolar frameworks.

### **Sunil**

I think this position should be clear: I am not making any conclusive statement other than that there is a global debate and we should examine whether and how we can intervene and introduce Swaraj in it.

### **Girish**

Can we deepen and reformulate the “knowledge question” in the current global context. During the rise of globalization, Lokavidya thought clarified our understanding of this and brought between large-scale exploitation of lokavidya. With globalization weakening, the context has shifted and we have increasingly felt the need for exploring the relationship between knowledge and politics, especially through ideas like Swaraj, Mandal, and local self-governance rooted in responsiveness, dialogue, and mutual respect. What else do we have to say about the knowledge question as such? A genuinely multipolar world might offer more space for local formations than a unipolar one. Ultimately, the central concern is how to advance the formulation of the knowledge question in light of evolving political and international realities.

### **Krish**

The current global tensions—whether framed as multipolarity or unipolarity—are fundamentally about control over markets and resources within the capitalist system. Policies such as tariffs, attempts to control territories like Greenland, interventions in oil-producing countries such as Venezuela and Iran, and major trade deals are seen as efforts by dominant powers (the U.S., China, Russia, and Europe) to secure market advantage and resource control. In this struggle, the greatest losers are the Bahujan Samaj—especially those whose livelihoods depend on Lokavidya, agriculture, and small-scale production. Trade agreements and import policies, particularly in agriculture and textiles, are viewed as direct threats to local economies, food systems, and long-term autonomy, potentially reshaping consumption patterns and deepening dependency. Instead of debating great-power politics abstractly, this moment should be used to mobilize Lokavidya-based communities by highlighting how global trade regimes and technological pushes like AI

primarily serve capitalist expansion rather than people's welfare. The defense of Lokavidya and Bahujan livelihoods should be at the center of political action.

### **Gandhi**

The world is moving toward multipolarity due to the relative decline of the United States, driven largely by China's rise and technological advances. Globalization has failed to benefit the American middle and working classes, enabling figures like Donald Trump to channel domestic discontent through promises of renewed national strength. Efforts by countries such as the BRICS bloc to move away from the dollar are seen as further signs of weakening U.S. dominance, and even potential military interventions are interpreted as symptoms of decline rather than strength. In this shifting global order, there are opportunities to advance discussions of Swaraj, local governance, and Lokavidya. The U.S. is attempting to sustain imperial dominance through control of artificial intelligence, which is a tool of "knowledge imperialism" that threatens livelihoods and could displace ordinary workers. Regardless of whether the dominant power is the U.S. or China, AI is potentially enslaving. We should reimagine sovereignty at the local level through Swaraj, Mandal structures, and strengthening local markets as expressions of grassroots sovereignty. The current global transition appears to be a favorable moment to foreground local autonomy, knowledge traditions, and resistance to centralized technological control.

### **Suresh**

I think we need to be caution against simplistic interpretations of recent global developments. The current U.S. actions should not be narrowly framed as attacks on free trade, rule-based systems, multilateralism, dollar hegemony, or democracy. Nor should emerging alternatives like BRICS be overstated, since their economic weight remains marginal relative to the global system. We need a deeper analysis of long-term structural changes in capitalism over the past 30–50 years.

That the U.S. is simply a "dying empire" in its final violent phase may simply not be true. Even with relative weakening, immense concentration of wealth and power—especially among the top 0.1%—remains intact. Maybe we are seeing a transition within capitalism itself. Maybe that unprecedented extraction of value from people and nature contemporary capitalism, and resulting structural limits create a drive for new forms of extraction and control, potentially through technologies like AI, biotechnology, and other emerging tools, combined with cultural and ideological shifts. These could enable deeper forms of domination, even mass dispossession or social restructuring. Technological and intellectual systems are not neutral but embedded within power structures. The U.S., in particular, may be attempting to manage its crisis by reshaping international relations and consolidating control through knowledge-driven systems. China's rise is intertwined with Western markets, and it could itself become imperial or militaristic under global pressures. Thus, global rivalry may intensify rather than lead to systemic transformation. Capitalism, instead of collapsing imminently, may evolve into new, potentially darker forms. Therefore, rather than rely on narratives of Western decline, the task is to analyze these structural shifts critically. Only after that should movements rooted in ideas like Bahujan, Swaraj, and decentralization attempt to situate themselves within this changing global context.

**Girish**

Let us meet again next Wednesday to continue the discussion. But, Suresh, I am concerned that the analysis you presented did not indicate spaces for action or concrete directions for us. Maybe my impression of what you said is darker than you meant, but it does seem to be limiting as it requires unfamiliar forms of analysis. We should carry the discussion forward, around the previously shared Summary and Draft Program.

**Suresh**

You're absolutely right. And that's a task for me... For example, you know, I can't imagine anything at this point, but I think we must.