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Teachers' Day 2026 Highlights Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's Educational Philosophy, Nation-Building Role and Legacy

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Recent Developments:

- **Teachers' Day** was observed across India on **5 September 2026** to commemorate the birth anniversary of **Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**, India's second President, philosopher, educationist and distinguished teacher. The day has been observed in India since **1962**.
- On Teachers' Day 2026, **President Droupadi Murmu** conferred **National Teachers' Awards on 48 school teachers** at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, recognising exemplary contributions to the quality of school education and student development.
- The 2026 awards also recognised **21 teachers and faculty members from higher education institutions and polytechnics**, comprising 12 from central higher education institutions, 5 from state universities and colleges, and 4 from polytechnics.
- The **National Teachers' Awards**, instituted in **1958**, provide public recognition to meritorious teachers and are administered under the overall supervision of the **Ministry of Education**.
- The President's 2026 Teachers' Day message emphasised that teachers contribute not merely to academic learning but also to **nurturing talent, strengthening character, recognising individual potential and developing responsible human beings**.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan: Life and Intellectual Formation:

Early Life and Education:

- **Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** was born on **5 September 1888** at **Tiruttani**, then part of the Madras Presidency and now located in Tamil Nadu.
- He received his higher education at **Christian College, Madras**, where he developed a deep interest in **philosophy, religion and comparative thought**.
- His intellectual development was shaped by an effort to interpret Indian philosophical traditions in dialogue with Western philosophical thought, making him one of the most influential Indian philosophers of the modern period.
- His later writings sought to demonstrate that Indian philosophical traditions possessed considerable **rational, ethical and spiritual depth**, while also engaging critically with modernity.

Academic Career:

- Radhakrishnan taught philosophy at several leading institutions and subsequently became associated with major centres of higher learning, including the **University of Mysore** and the **University of Calcutta**.
- He served as Vice-Chancellor of **Andhra University from 1931 to 1936** and later became Vice-Chancellor of **Banaras Hindu University**, demonstrating his wider engagement with institution-building in Indian higher education.

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- In 1936, he became the **Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford**, becoming the first Indian to hold an Oxford chair.
- His international academic career gave Indian philosophical traditions greater visibility within global intellectual discourse and strengthened the academic study of Indian philosophy and religion.

Contribution to Philosophy and Comparative Religion:

Indian Philosophy and the Western Intellectual World:

- Radhakrishnan played a significant role in presenting **Indian philosophy** to Western audiences through systematic interpretations of **Vedanta, Hindthought, comparative religion and ethics**.
- His approach did not simply reproduce traditional philosophical ideas but attempted to interpret them in a manner accessible to modern intellectual discourse.
- His major works included **Indian Philosophy, The HindView of Life, An Idealist View of Life and Eastern Religions and Western Thought**, through which he explored the relationship between Indian philosophical traditions and modern intellectual currents.
- His scholarship contributed to the intellectual defence of Indian civilisation during the colonial period by demonstrating that Indian philosophical traditions possessed sophisticated systems of metaphysics, ethics and epistemology.

Philosophy as a Social and Ethical Discipline:

- Radhakrishnan viewed philosophy not merely as an abstract academic discipline but as a means of understanding **human life, morality, religion and social responsibility**.
- His writings emphasised the importance of dialogue between different religious and philosophical traditions, making **comparative religion and intercultural understanding** important dimensions of his intellectual legacy.
- His thought is therefore relevant to contemporary debates concerning **pluralism, tolerance, ethical education and civilisational dialogue**.

Radhakrishnan's Educational Philosophy:

Education as Social Transformation:

- Radhakrishnan regarded **education as an instrument of social transformation** capable of developing intellectual independence, moral responsibility and a deeper understanding of human society.
- He believed that education should not be restricted to the accumulation of information but should cultivate **reason, character, ethical awareness and responsible citizenship**.
- His approach placed teachers at the centre of nation-building because teachers influence both the intellectual development and moral orientation of future generations.

Teacher as Nation Builder:

- Radhakrishnan considered the teacher a crucial link between **knowledge, character formation and social progress**.
- The modern relevance of his educational philosophy lies in the recognition that effective teachers do more than transmit curriculum; they encourage **critical thinking, curiosity, ethical reasoning and independent judgement**.
- Teachers therefore contribute directly to the development of **human capital**, social cohesion and democratic citizenship.

University Education Commission:

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- Radhakrishnan chaired the **University Education Commission, 1948–49**, popularly known as the **Radhakrishnan Commission**, which examined the condition and future direction of higher education in independent India.
- The Commission emphasised the importance of improving the quality of universities, strengthening teaching standards, developing research and ensuring that higher education contributed to national development.
- Its recommendations became an important foundation for subsequent thinking on higher education policy and influenced the evolution of India's post-independence higher education system.

Political and Diplomatic Career:

Ambassador and Vice President:

- Radhakrishnan served as **India's Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1949 to 1952**, representing India during the formative years of its post-independence foreign policy.
- He became the **first Vice President of India in 1952** and served in that office until **1962**.
- His tenure reflected the role of intellectuals and public scholars in India's early diplomatic and constitutional institutions.

Second President of India:

- Radhakrishnan became the **second President of India**, serving from **13 May 1962 to 13 May 1967**.
- His presidency coincided with a critical phase of the Indian Republic, including the **1962 India-China War**, the **1965 India-Pakistan War** and significant debates concerning national development and democratic consolidation.
- He was widely respected for his scholarship, intellectual dignity and commitment to **constitutional democracy and parliamentary institutions**.

Teachers' Day in India:

Origin and Significance:

- India observes **5 September as Teachers' Day** because it marks the birth anniversary of Dr. Radhakrishnan.
- When admirers sought permission to celebrate his birthday after he became President in **1962**, he suggested that the day instead be dedicated to teachers, thereby transforming a personal commemoration into a national tribute to the teaching profession.
- Teachers' Day consequently represents not merely a celebration of an individual but recognition of the broader contribution of teachers to **education, character formation, social development and nation-building**.

National Teachers' Awards:

- The **National Teachers' Awards** were instituted in **1958**, several years before Teachers' Day formally began in 1962, to recognise teachers who demonstrated exceptional commitment to improving education and enriching students' learning experiences.
- The contemporary selection system emphasises a **transparent, online and multi-stage process**, involving self-nomination, institutional or peer participation, screening and an independent national jury.
- The awards therefore provide an institutional mechanism for recognising **innovation, excellence, dedication and measurable educational impact** rather than treating Teachers' Day solely as a ceremonial occasion.

Bharat Ratna and Legacy:

National Recognition:

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- Radhakrishnan was awarded the **Bharat Ratna in 1954**, India's highest civilian honour, in recognition of his exceptional contribution to philosophy, education and public life.
- His legacy extends across **philosophy, education, diplomacy, constitutional governance and public intellectual life**, making him an important figure for understanding the intellectual foundations of post-independence India.

Contemporary Relevance:

- Radhakrishnan's emphasis on education as a means of developing **ethical and intellectually independent citizens** remains relevant to contemporary educational reforms.
- His life demonstrates the connection between **education and public service**, as he moved from academia to diplomacy, constitutional office and the Presidency while retaining his identity as a scholar and teacher.
- His emphasis on comparative thought and dialogue remains relevant to a diverse society where **constitutional values, pluralism, tolerance and critical thinking** are essential for democratic citizenship.

UPSC Perspective: Education and Nation-Building:

Link with General Studies:

- **General Studies Paper I:** Radhakrishnan's contribution can be connected with **Indian intellectual traditions, modern Indian thinkers and the evolution of educational institutions**.
- **General Studies Paper II:** His career is relevant to **education policy, constitutional democracy, institutional development, governance and social-sector administration**.
- **General Studies Paper IV:** His emphasis on teachers, moral development and responsible citizenship provides examples for **ethics, integrity, compassion, public service and character formation**.
- **Essay Paper:** Teachers' Day can provide a broader framework for essays concerning **education as an instrument of social transformation, human capital development and nation-building**.

Challenges in Contemporary Teacher Education:

Quality and Professional Development:

- India's educational transformation requires teachers who are adequately trained in **pedagogy, digital learning, inclusive education, competency-based assessment and critical thinking**.
- Continuous professional development is essential because teachers must adapt to technological change, diverse classrooms and evolving learning requirements.

Technology and Artificial Intelligence:

- The expansion of **artificial intelligence and digital education** can improve personalised learning and access to educational resources, but technology cannot completely substitute the teacher's role in mentorship, emotional support, ethical guidance and social development.
- The future education system therefore requires a **human-centred technology model** in which digital tools strengthen rather than replace teachers.

Equity and Inclusion:

- Teacher quality must be accompanied by equitable access to education for children from **economically weaker, socially disadvantaged, rural, tribal and differently abled backgrounds**.
- Teachers play an important role in creating inclusive classrooms and preventing discrimination, exclusion and learning gaps.

Way Forward:

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Strengthening the Teacher-Centred Education System:

- India should strengthen **teacher education, professional development, research-based pedagogy and school leadership** to improve learning outcomes.
- Recruitment and deployment policies should reduce teacher shortages and ensure a more equitable distribution of teachers across regions and social groups.
- Teacher appraisal should focus not merely on administrative compliance but also on **learning outcomes, innovation, inclusion, mentoring and community engagement**.
- Greater integration of **digital tools, artificial intelligence, experiential learning and competency-based education** can improve teaching effectiveness while retaining the teacher as the central human element of education.
- Teachers should be empowered as **professionals and nation-builders**, with adequate institutional support, autonomy, training and recognition.

Value Addition for UPSC:

Key Facts:

- **Born:** 5 September 1888, Tiruttani.
- **Died:** 17 April 1975.
- **First Vice President of India:** 1952–1962.
- **Second President of India:** 13 May 1962–13 May 1967.
- **Bharat Ratna:** 1954.
- **University Education Commission:** 1948–49.
- **Spalding Professorship at Oxford:** From 1936, where he became the first Indian to hold an Oxford chair.
- **Teachers' Day in India:** 5 September, observed since 1962.
- **National Teachers' Awards:** Instituted in 1958 and presented annually to recognise meritorious teachers.

Teachers' Day 2026: 48 school teachers and 21 teachers/faculty from higher education institutions and polytechnics were recognised through the National Teachers' Awards.