World Philosophy Day 2026 – 19 November (UNESCO)

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News

UNESCO celebrates World Philosophy Day every year on the third Thursday of November; in 2026 it falls on 19 November. The first World Philosophy Day was held on 21 November 2002, and UNESCO's General Conference formally proclaimed it in 2005. It aims to promote critical and independent thinking and the teaching of philosophy around the world. On 19 November 2026 a plenary session titled (correct) – venue detail can be added: UNESCO HQ, Room II, 6.30 pm will be held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. According to the UN event programme, Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, professor emeritus at Columbia University, will give the keynote 'Together inhabiting the Earth'.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Date	Third Thursday of November – 19 Nov in 2026
Led by	UNESCO (HQ: Paris)
First held	21 November 2002
Formally proclaimed	2005 – UNESCO General Conference
2026 plenary title	(correct) – venue detail can be added: UNESCO HQ, Room II, 6.30 pm
Keynote	Souleymane Bachir Diagne – 'Together inhabiting the Earth'

Point	Details
Saiva Siddhanta	Meykandar – Sivajnana Bodham (13th c.)
Sanmarga	Vallalar – Sathya Gnana Sabai, Vadalur (25.1.1872)

Background

- UNESCO and philosophy: UNESCO's General Conference said philosophy encourages critical and independent thought and helps understanding of the world, tolerance and peace. The day was therefore created to promote the teaching of philosophy in schools and universities. In the Greek tradition, Socrates, Plato ('The Republic') and Aristotle are key figures.
- Indian philosophical tradition: The six 'astika' darshanas that accept the Vedas are Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. The 'nastika' traditions that reject them are Charvaka (Lokayata), Buddhism and Jainism. Charvaka is a materialism that accepts only perception as valid knowledge and denies rebirth and the afterlife. Vedanta has the schools of Advaita (Adi Sankara, born at Kaladi in Keralam), Vishishtadvaita (Ramanuja) and Dvaita (Madhva).
- Tamil philosophical tradition: Thiruvalluvar's Tirukkural sets out an ethics of life in three parts – Aram (virtue), Porul (wealth) and Inbam (love). Seethalai Sathanar's Manimekalai is an epic that explains Buddhist ethics and logic; Neelakesi is a Jain philosophical debate text. Tirumular's Tirumantiram (the 10th Tirumurai) underlies both the Siddhar tradition and Saiva Siddhanta. Meykandar of Tiruvennainallur wrote 'Sivajnana Bodham' (12 sutras), the first canonical text of Saiva Siddhanta, explaining the triad of Pati (God), Pasu (soul) and Pasam (bondage).
- Modern Tamil Nadu: Ramalinga Adigal (Vallalar) taught the 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga' path, free of caste and creed distinctions, centred on compassion to all living beings (Jeevakarunyam). The Sathya Gnana Sabai at Vadalur, built to his plan, was opened to the public on 25 January 1872. Tiruttani-born philosopher Dr S. Radhakrishnan wrote 'Indian Philosophy' and later became President of India.

Tamil Nadu link: Tamil Nadu's contribution to world philosophy is rich – the ethics of the Tirukkural, the Buddhist logic of Manimekalai, the Siddhar tradition including Tirumular, Meykandar's Saiva Siddhanta (Tiruvennainallur, Viluppuram district), the Vishishtadvaita of Sriperumbudur-born Ramanuja, and Vallalar's Sanmarga at Vadalur. Saiva Siddhanta is often hailed as the distinctive philosophy of the Tamils.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

UNESCO celebrates World Philosophy Day every year on the third Thursday of November; in 2026 it falls on 19 November. The first World Philosophy Day was held on 21 November 2002, and UNESCO's General Conference formally proclaimed it in 2005.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Date: Third Thursday of November – 19 Nov in 2026; Led by: UNESCO (HQ: Paris); First held: 21 November 2002; Formally proclaimed: 2005 – UNESCO General Conference.

What is the background to this news?

UNESCO and philosophy: UNESCO's General Conference said philosophy encourages critical and independent thought and helps understanding of the world, tolerance and peace.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. On which day every year is UNESCO's World Philosophy Day celebrated?

A) Always 19 November

B) Second Thursday of Nov

C) Third Monday of Nov

D) Third Thursday of Nov

Answer: D – Explanation: Third Thursday of November – 19 Nov in 2026. First held on 21 Nov 2002; proclaimed by UNESCO's General Conference in 2005.

2. Who wrote 'Sivajnana Bodham', the first canonical text of Saiva Siddhanta?

A) Tirumular

B) Meykandar

C) Arulnandi Sivam

D) Umapathi Sivam

Answer: B – Explanation: Meykandar (13th c., Tiruvennainallur) – 12 sutras; the triad of Pati, Pasu and Pasam.

3. Which Tamil epic explains Buddhist ethics and methods of logic in detail?

A) Silappatikaram

B) Manimekalai

C) Seevaka Chintamani

D) Valayapathi

Answer: B – Explanation: Manimekalai – by Seethalai Sathanar. Seevaka Chintamani is by Tiruttakkadevar (Jain); Silappatikaram by Ilango Adigal.

4. Where is the Sathya Gnana Sabai founded by Vallalar, who taught the 'Samarasa Suddha Sanmarga' path?

A) Chidambaram

B) Marudur

C) Vadalur

D) Mettukuppam

Answer: C – Explanation: Vadalur (Cuddalore district) – opened 25.1.1872. Marudur is Vallalar's birthplace; Mettukuppam, where he spent his last days.

5. Which Indian materialist school accepted only perception as knowledge and denied rebirth and the afterlife?

A) Charvaka (Lokayata)

B) Mimamsa

C) Vedanta

D) Samkhya

Answer: A – Explanation: Charvaka – a nastika school rejecting the Vedas. Mimamsa, Vedanta and Samkhya are astika darshanas that accept them.

Sources: UN Indico – World Philosophy Day 2026 programme, indico.un.org/event/1024266/program; UNESCO UNESDOC – 'Proclamation of World Philosophy Day', unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140277 (2005); vallalar.org (Sathya Gnana Sabai); UNESCO – unesco.org/en/days/philosophy; UNESDOC 33 C/Resolution (2005); TN State Board Class 11/12 Tamil & History textbooks (Saiva Siddhanta, Vallalar); vallalar.org; Tamil Virtual Academy (tamilvu.org) for Sivajnana Bodham. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.