

Swachhata Hi Seva 2026: Theme, Five Pillars, Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus and the Himachal Pradesh Angle

For UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) and HPAS (Himachal Pradesh Administrative Service) aspirants

Can a country stay clean if only sanitation workers do the cleaning? The Government of India says no. The **Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) 2026** campaign runs from **17 September to 2 October 2026** with the theme **"Swachhata Mein Sahbhag; Swachh Bharat, Viksit Bharat"** (Participation in Cleanliness; Clean India, Developed India). Its message is simple: cleanliness is the duty of every citizen, not of the government alone.

The campaign comes a few months after the **Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules, 2026** came into force. These rules require every household to separate its waste into four types at home.

1. Swachh Bharat Mission and Swachhata Hi Seva: The Difference

- **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** is the main national cleanliness programme. It was launched on **2 October 2014**, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- **Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS)** is a short campaign held every year since **2017** to support the Mission. It lasts about two weeks and ends on **Swachh Bharat Diwas (2 October)**.
- **SBM has two parts: Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G)** for villages – toilets and the handling of solid and liquid waste; and **Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U)** for towns and cities – garbage collection, processing and clean public places.
- **Jan Bhagidari** means people's participation. Citizens do **shramdaan** – unpaid physical work for the community, such as cleaning a street or a stream.

2. The Five Pillars of Swachhata Hi Seva 2026

The campaign is built on five main activities, called pillars.

Pillar	What happens	Purpose
1. Transformation of Cleanliness Target Units (CTUs) and Clean Public Places	CTUs are places where garbage is dumped again and again. They are cleaned, made attractive and then looked after regularly. Public toilets are checked. Citizens can report complaints on the Swachhata App.	Keep places clean permanently, not for one day
2. Swachh Paathshala - Yuva for Swachhata	Students of Classes 6 to 12 visit waste-processing plants and sanitation facilities on <i>Swachhata Gyan Yatras</i> (cleanliness learning trips).	Build clean habits in young people
3. SafaiMitra Suraksha Seva Evam Samman Shivirs	Camps for sanitation workers (<i>SafaiMitras</i>) and their families: health check-ups, safety equipment and help in joining welfare schemes.	Safety and respect for sanitation workers
4. Jan Bhagidari for Swachhata	Showing people how to separate waste into four types, make compost at home, stop littering and avoid single-use plastic. <i>Swachh Parv</i> , <i>Harit Parv</i> promotes plastic-free festivals.	Make every citizen responsible

Pillar	What happens	Purpose
5. Swachhata Se Samriddhi	Promotes the 3Rs – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. <i>Kabaad Se Jugaad</i> : making useful items from scrap. <i>Kabaad Se Kala</i> : making art from scrap.	Recover value from waste

3. FACES: How Public Toilets Are Checked

A toilet is counted as good only if it passes all five FACES tests.

F	A	C	E	S
Functional – it works, with water and lights	Accessible – everyone, including persons with disabilities, can use it	Clean – kept clean every day	Eco-friendly – does not pollute surroundings	Safe – secure, especially for women and children

Example: A roadside toilet that is locked, has no ramp and has no lights at night fails the Functional, Accessible and Safe tests. It exists on paper but cannot be used.

4. Important Dates of the Campaign

- **17 September 2026** – Campaign begins.
- **1 October 2026** – *"Ek Din, Ek Ghanta, Ek Saath"* (One Day, One Hour, Together): the whole country cleans for one hour at the same time.
- **2 October 2026** – **Special Gram Sabhas** (meetings of all adult voters of a village) and **Special Council Meetings** of urban local bodies (municipal corporations, municipal councils and nagar panchayats) discuss waste management.
- These meetings connect the campaign to local self-government created by the **73rd Constitutional Amendment (Panchayati Raj, 1992)** and the **74th Constitutional Amendment (Urban Local Bodies, 1992)**.

5. ODF Plus: The Next Step After Toilets

Open Defecation Free (ODF) means no one in the area defecates in the open; everyone uses a toilet. Rural India was declared ODF in **2019**. **ODF Plus** means the village stays ODF *and* also manages its garbage and dirty water.

Category	What the village must have (all must stay ODF)
ODF Plus Aspiring	Solid waste management or liquid waste management
ODF Plus Rising	Solid waste management and liquid waste management
ODF Plus Model	Both systems + visibly clean village + ODF Plus awareness messages

Solid waste = kitchen waste, plastic, paper. Liquid waste = used water from kitchens, bathrooms and drains (greywater).

Data (Press Information Bureau (PIB), as on 17 September 2026): more than **5.69 lakh** villages are ODF Plus. Of these, more than **5.25 lakh** are ODF Plus Model villages — about **92%**. Always write these numbers with their date. They are government-reported figures, not results of an independent survey.

6. Why the Campaign Matters

- **Participatory governance:** citizens help find and solve local problems instead of only waiting for the government.
- **Public health:** fewer garbage heaps mean fewer mosquitoes, flies and rats that spread diseases.
- **Environment:** less dumping and burning of garbage keeps air, soil and rivers clean.
- **Inclusion:** safe, easy-to-use toilets help women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities.
- **Circular economy:** an economy where materials are reused and recycled again and again instead of being thrown away. Separated waste becomes compost and recycled goods.
- **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations:** SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities; SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production.

7. Challenges

- **Short-lived cleanliness:** a cleaned spot becomes a dump again if garbage is not collected daily.
- **Mixing of separated waste:** households separate waste, but it is mixed again in one vehicle. People then stop separating.
- **Weak local bodies:** panchayats and small towns lack money, staff and technical knowledge.
- **Worker safety:** a one-day health camp is not enough; workers need machines, insurance and safety gear all year.
- **Wrong measurement:** counting rallies and pledges does not show whether places stay clean.

Key point for Mains: *People's participation can support public services, but it cannot replace them.*

8. Himachal Pradesh (HP) Angle

Himachal's record

- **HP Non-Biodegradable Garbage (Control) Act, 1995** – an early state law against throwing waste that does not decompose, such as plastic.
- **2009:** Himachal banned polythene carry bags, among the first states to do so.
- **2016:** Rural Himachal was declared ODF – the second state after Sikkim.

Problems special to the hills

- **Tourist pressure:** Manali, Shimla, Kasol and Spiti produce far more garbage in tourist season than local systems are built for.
- **Difficult terrain:** houses are scattered on steep slopes, so collecting garbage is costly; flat land for landfills is scarce.
- **Water sources at risk:** garbage thrown on slopes slides into nallahs (streams) and rivers that supply water to the plains.
- **Disaster risk:** drains blocked by garbage make flash floods and landslide damage worse during the monsoon.

Possible solutions

- Composting at panchayat and ward level, so waste is treated near where it is produced.
- Hotels and homestays, which produce large amounts of waste, to process or hand over separated waste.
- *Swachh Parv, Harit Parv* at fairs such as Kullu Dussehra, Mandi Shivratri and Chamba's Minjar.
- Trekkers and pilgrims to bring back their waste; a refundable deposit on bottles and packets can encourage this.

9. Way Forward

- **Clear responsibility:** name a person or body to look after each cleaned spot, and check it again after 90 days.
- **Separate collection:** provide separate vehicles and processing units, so separated waste is not mixed again.
- **Stronger local bodies:** more funds, staff and a working complaint system for panchayats and municipalities.
- **Worker welfare:** machines for cleaning, training, insurance and safety rules for sanitation workers.
- **Less waste first:** reduce and reuse before recycling.
- **Measure results:** track working toilets, share of waste separated, waste processed and whether dumping returns.

Key Terms Box

Term	Simple meaning
Jan Bhagidari	People's participation in government programmes
Shramdaan	Unpaid physical work done for the community
Cleanliness Target Unit (CTU)	A place where garbage is dumped again and again
FACES	Functional, Accessible, Clean, Eco-friendly, Safe – five tests for toilets
Four-way segregation	Separating waste at home into wet, dry, sanitary and special-care waste (Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026)
Open Defecation Free (ODF)	Everyone uses a toilet; no one defecates in the open
ODF Plus	ODF village that also manages solid and/or liquid waste
Circular economy	Reusing and recycling materials instead of throwing them away
SafaiMitra	Sanitation worker
Gram Sabha	Meeting of all adult voters of a village panchayat

Exam Angle: UPSC and HPPSC (Himachal Pradesh Public Service Commission)

Prelims - common traps

- SHS is a yearly campaign (since 2017); SBM is the main mission (since 2014). Do not confuse them.
- Theme 2026: *Swachhata Mein Sahbhag; Swachh Bharat, Viksit Bharat*.
- Full form of FACES; conditions for ODF Plus Aspiring, Rising and Model.
- 'Every ODF Plus village is a Model village' – this statement is **wrong**.

Syllabus link

Paper	Syllabus topic
UPSC General Studies (GS) Paper II	Government policies and interventions; local self-government; welfare of vulnerable sections
UPSC General Studies (GS) Paper III	Environmental pollution and conservation
HPAS General Studies Paper II (Unit II)	Good governance and public service delivery; Self Help Groups (SHGs) and civil society; 73rd and 74th Amendments in HP
HPAS General Studies Paper III (Units I and III)	Current schemes – Swachh Bharat Mission is named in the syllabus; environment protection; effects of tourism on the environment of HP

Source: HPAS Main Examination syllabus, Rajpatra (Official Gazette) Himachal Pradesh, notification of 30 June 2016. Check the latest HPPSC notification for any later change.

Mains practice questions

- "Sanitation outcomes depend as much on behavioural change and local governance as on infrastructure." Discuss with reference to Swachhata Hi Seva. **(UPSC, 250 words)**
- Examine the challenges of solid waste management in the hill towns of Himachal Pradesh and suggest a community-based solution. **(HPAS)**

Conclusion

Swachhata Hi Seva 2026 makes cleanliness a shared duty of citizens, local bodies and government. Its real test is not the number of events held in these two weeks, but whether places stay clean for the rest of the year. For Himachal Pradesh, clean hills also mean clean rivers for the people living downstream.