

Resources for Tourism in the Badrinath Zone

The Badrinath Tourist Zone (Map 4.1), as delineated for this study, falls in the northern part of Chamoli district, within the Joshimath *tehsil*. The Joshimath *tehsil* is the northernmost area of Chamoli district, parts of which lie in the trans-Himalayan zone. Chamoli district hosts the two most venerated shrines of Badrinath and Kedarnath.

Physiographic Features of the Badrinath Zone

Though the region is small, the physiography is varied. There are three different divisions that constitute the region.

The Zaskar Range

A very small portion of this range falls in the north and north-eastern parts of the region. The altitude varies from 4,000 to 7,750m. There are about 3,000 people living in this physiographic regime spread over a dozen villages. Mana, north of Badrinath, is the last village in the North. Malari is an important village on the banks of the Dhauliganga.

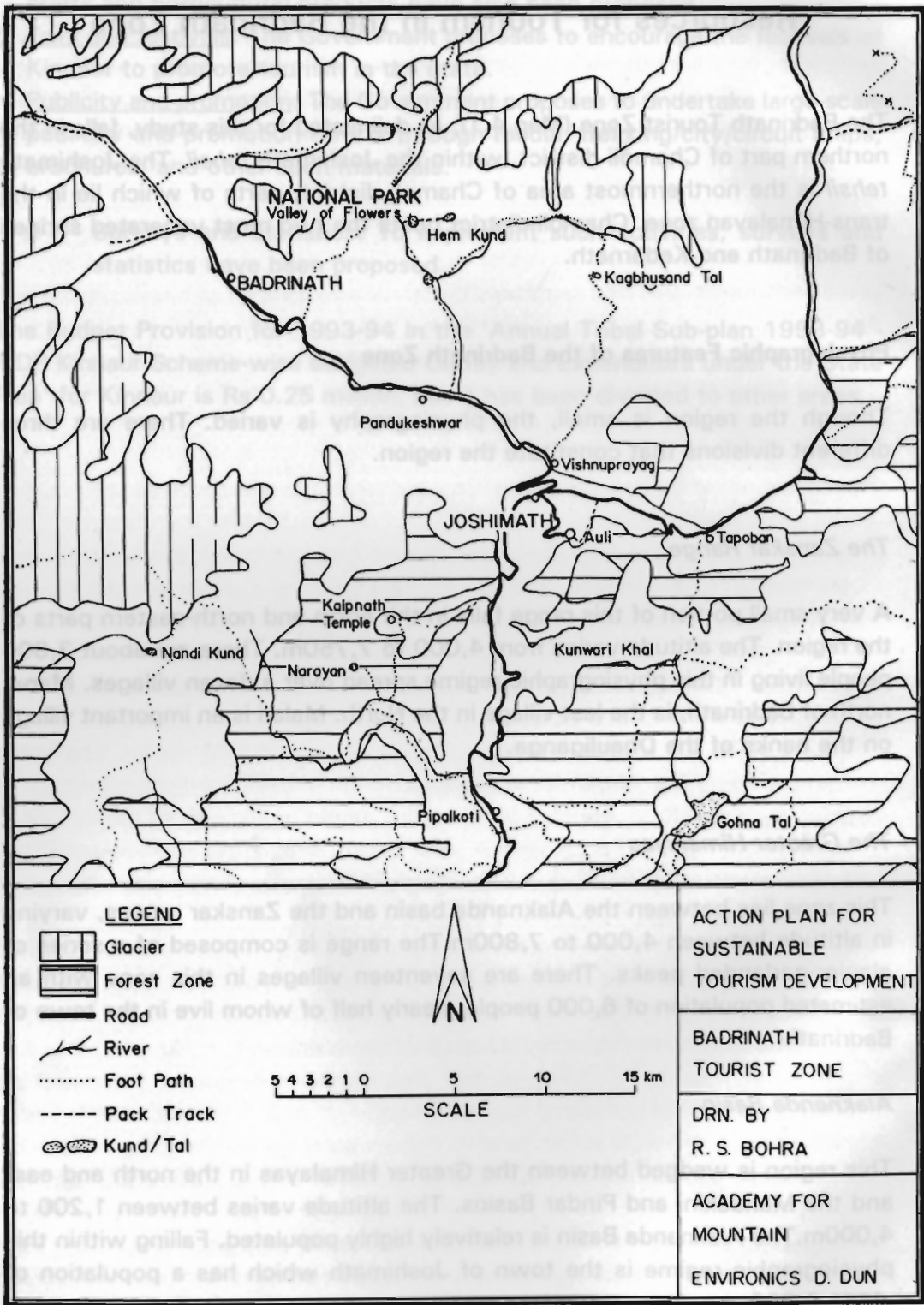
The Greater Himalayas

This zone lies between the Alaknanda basin and the Zaskar ranges, varying in altitude between 4,000 to 7,800m. The range is composed of a series of glacier-garlanded peaks. There are seventeen villages in this zone with an estimated population of 6,000 people, nearly half of whom live in the town of Badrinath.

Alaknanda Basin

This region is wedged between the Greater Himalayas in the north and east and the Mandakini and Pindar Basins. The altitude varies between 1,200 to 4,000m. The Alaknanda Basin is relatively highly populated. Falling within this physiographic regime is the town of Joshimath which has a population of about 9,000.

Map 4.1 Badrinath Tourist Zone



Physical Resources

Physical resources of land, water, and forests are abundant, although their utilisation for local community development is still not managed well, despite a long history of human activity in the region.

Land

The Joshimath *tehsil* has a total area of 841.89sq.km. Nearly 50 per cent of the land in the *tehsil* is cultivable wastes and another two-fifths is uncultivable, as it is either under permanent snow cover or is bereft of any soil. The cultivable agricultural land is just about five per cent of the total land area. Forests cover less than five per cent (Figure 4.1).

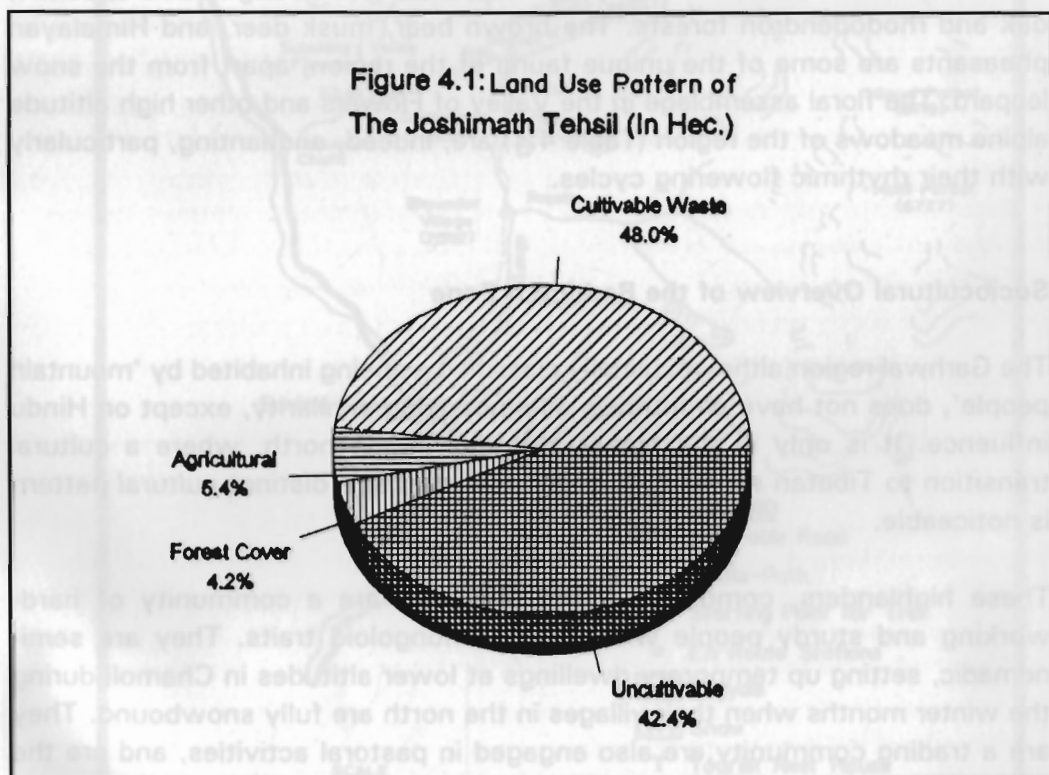


Figure 4.1 Land Use Pattern of Joshimath *Tehsil*

Water Resources

Water resources are abundant, yet there is a physical difficulty in accessing water from the main rivers. Natural springs abound, and, apart from the smaller streams, they are the main source for local villages. Piped water supply

is limited to settlements along the main road. Water supply is highly dependent on the electricity, which is only notionally available, as for long periods there is no supply. Even in the town of Badrinath, a fifth of the households depend on the Rishi Ganga River without any supply network. There is a hot spring at Badrinath with considerable flow, and it is used invariably by every pilgrim for bathing before prayers at the temple.

Forests

Though the forest area is comparatively small, some of the forested tracks in the region are extremely diverse in terms of their floral assemblage. On the trek from Govindghat, on the main road to the Valley of Flowers, one passes through thick forests of oak, rhododendron, and birch (Map 4.2). Similarly the Joshimath - Auli - Gorson - Kuari Pass Trek takes one through some excellent oak and rhododendron forests. The brown bear, musk deer, and Himalayan pheasants are some of the unique fauna of the region, apart from the snow leopard. The floral assemblage in the Valley of Flowers and other high altitude alpine meadows of the region (Table 4.1) are, indeed, enchanting, particularly with their rhythmic flowering cycles.

Sociocultural Overview of the Badrinath Zone

The Garhwal region, although usually classified as being inhabited by 'mountain people', does not have an intrinsic all-embodying similarity, except on Hindu influence. It is only in the higher altitudes in the north, where a cultural transition to Tibetan ethnicity is encountered, that a distinct cultural pattern is noticeable.

These highlanders, commonly called *bhotia(s)*, are a community of hard-working and sturdy people with distinct Mongoloid traits. They are semi-nomadic, setting up temporary dwellings at lower altitudes in Chamoli during the winter months when their villages in the north are fully snowbound. They are a trading community, are also engaged in pastoral activities, and are the ones who have been most affected by the breakdown of trading links with Tibet after the Indo-China war of 1962. The two major clans of *bhotia* in the region are the Marchhaya and Tolcha. Mana village, near Badrinath, is the chief settlement of the Marchhaya clan; the Tolcha clan is largely settled in Malari, in the Niti Valley. From a prosperous trading community, the *bhotia* have been reduced to impecunious conditions, and they make a living by selling some of their woollen products in the pilgrim centres and finding occupations as porters and mountain guides.

Map 4.2: Trek Route to the Valley of Flowers

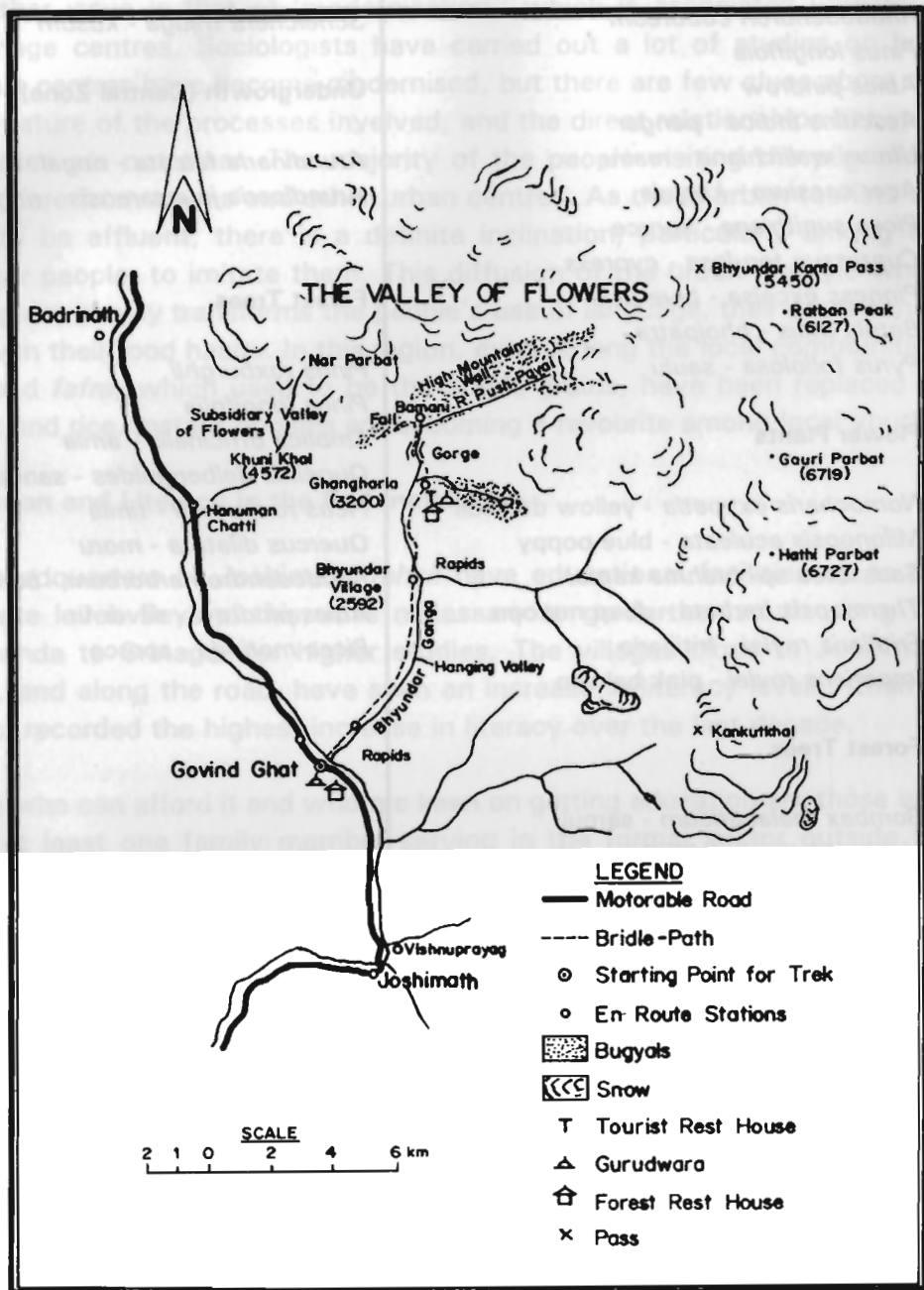


Table 4.1: Flora of the Valley Flowers

<p>Forest Trees</p> <p><i>Rhododendron coboreum</i> <i>Pinus longifolia</i> <i>Abies pindrow</i> <i>Aesculus indica</i> - pengar <i>Ulmus wallichiana</i> - mairu <i>Acer caesium</i> - kanjula <i>Picea sunithiana</i> - spruce <i>Cupressus torulosa</i> - cypress <i>Pinus excelsa</i> - blue pine <i>Betula utilis</i> - bhojpatra <i>Pyrus foliolosa</i> - saulu</p> <p>Flower Plants</p> <p><i>Nomocharis oxypetla</i> - yellow daffodil <i>Mllonopsis aculeata</i> - blue poppy <i>Saussurea</i> sp- brahma kamal <i>Thermopsis barbata</i> - deep maroon <i>Fritillaria roylei</i> - fritillaria <i>Impatiens roylei</i> - pink balsam</p> <p>Forest Trees</p> <p><i>Bombax malabaricum</i> - semul <i>Haldu</i> - <i>Adina cordifolia</i> <i>Dhaura</i> - <i>Lagerstroemia perviflora</i> <i>Amaltas</i> - <i>Cassia fistula</i> <i>Dudhi</i> - <i>Holarrhena antidysenterica</i> <i>Jhingan</i> - <i>Lanner grandis</i> <i>Timber</i> - <i>Garuga pinnata</i> <i>Rara</i> - <i>Randia longispina</i> <i>Dathber</i> - <i>Zizyphus xylopyra</i></p>	<p>Ornamental Forest Tree</p> <p><i>Scheichera trijuga</i> - kusum</p> <p>Undergrowth (Central Zone)</p> <p><i>Arundinaria falcata</i> - ringal <i>Arundinaria jaunsarensis</i> - ringal</p> <p>Forest Trees</p> <p><i>Pinus roxburghii</i> <i>Pinus longifolia</i> <i>Embllica officinalis</i> - amla <i>Ougeinia delbergioides</i> - sandan <i>Ficus roxburghii</i> - timla <i>Quercus dilatata</i> - moru <i>Rhododendron arboreum</i> - burans <i>Abies pindrow</i> - silver fir <i>Picea morinda</i> - spruce</p>
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The region is a historical pilgrimage site which has been visited by the religious for as long as can be remembered. Thus one sees a marked Hindu impact even on the *bhotia*. Over the years, a sort of cultural homogeneity has developed which has not only incorporated the local traditions but has also become imbued with Hindu traditions. Though Hemkund Sahib is a major Sikh

pilgrimage centre which sees a major inflow of visitors, the influence of Sikh tradition is not too great, probably because Sikhism is seen as a part of Hinduism.

The other issue is that of 'modernisation,' which is associated with most pilgrimage centres. Sociologists have carried out a lot of studies on how religious centres have become modernised, but there are few clues about the exact nature of the processes involved, and the direct relationships between processes are not clear. The majority of the people visiting the pilgrimage centres are from towns and other urban centres. As these urban tourists are seen to be affluent, there is a definite inclination, particularly among the younger people, to imitate them. This diffusion of the urban lifestyle which takes place slowly transforms the people's use of language, their dress sense, and even their food habits. In this region, even among the local communities, *ogla* and *fafra*, which used to be the staple grains, have been replaced by wheat and rice. Instant noodles are becoming a favourite among local youths.

Education and Literacy in the Badrinath Zone

The headquarters of Joshimath *tehsil* have educational facilities up to the graduate level. Beyond this, it is necessary to go further south along the Alaknanda to Srinagar for higher studies. The villages close to Joshimath *tehsil*, and along the road, have seen an increase in literacy levels. Chamoli district recorded the highest increase in literacy over the last decade.

Those who can afford it and who are keen on getting education are those who have at least one family member serving in the formal sector outside the region.

Economic Background of the Badrinath Zone

The district has a primarily agricultural economy. Though cereals such as rice and wheat are grown, it is the fruit plantations which have brought money to this region. Apples are the main cash crop though citrus fruits are also grown.

Most of the farms belong to small landholders. One half (712 of 1,526) of the orchards in Joshimath *tehsil* have an area of less than half an acre. The total area under orchard farming in Joshimath *tehsil* is 650ha. The non-availability of pesticides and other inputs often leads to a poor harvest. Because the quality is not very good, the apples from this region fetch a lower price than those from Himachal Pradesh.

Tourism used to be a more significant contributor in the past, when pilgrims walked and used settlements en route to stop over. Walking also meant longer stays in the region. In fact, the road came up after the trade with Tibet stopped. The trade barrier and extension of the motorable road up to the Badrinath Temple has deeply affected the local economy.

Inventory of Tourism Assets in the Badrinath Zone

Badrinath and Kedarnath are among the most religious pilgrimage centres. They attract people from all regions, all classes, and of all ages who want to earn religious merit by visiting shrines. Frugality, or living on a minimum and vegetarian diet, is seen as a virtue, because in a place of God, one needs to have control over one's senses. This idea of religious merit seems to give people a lot of strength. We saw people who were eighty years' old, making the arduous journey to Badrinath and Kedarnath without complaint. The lower middle class pilgrim's sole objective for visiting the holy places is religious. The scenic beauty provides spiritual recreation for them and they see everything in a religious light.

This attitude of the people should not be seen as a problem to promoting other areas for tourism. In fact, with proper publicity, many other tourist centres can be promoted. For example, all the people in the Hindu fraternity may know about Kedarnath where Lord Shiva is worshipped in his *Sada Shiva* form. This is the most sacred *Jyotirlinga*¹ in the country and is considered to be more than 4,000 years old; but there are few people who know about the *panch kedar*, which are almost equally sacrosanct. Rudranath (3,286m), where the effigy of Lord Shiva is worshipped, is known for its rock-cut temple. This place has some purified water tanks, and the legendary river of Vaitarni flows past the temple. Tunganath is the highest *kedar* where Lord Shiva's shoulders are worshipped, Kalpeshwar has the renowned adornment of Lord Shiva's hair, and Madmaheswar is the fifth *kedar*. With proper publicity, all these places can gain in importance, and there will be less pressure on any particular place.

Badrinath lies at the confluence of the Rishiganga and Alakhananda rivers. It got its name from its carpet of wild barriers or *badri* (there seems to be a myth behind the name). It is said that no pilgrimage is complete unless one visits Badrinath. Badrinath has the Nar and Naryan mountain ranges guarding it with the imposing Neelkanth Peak in between. Badrinath also has the *Panch*

¹ Likeness of the Shiva Lingam (phallus).

Badri spread over the hilly region of Chamoli. Besides, on the route to Badrinath, there are many religious centres and places of scenic beauty. Three kilometres from Badrinath is Mana, where there is the legendary 'Bhim pul', a bridge said to be built by the Pandav, Bhim, when the Pandavas were in exile. Mana also has the Vyas *Gufa* (cave), where the Mahabharata is said to have been written, as well as the Ganesh *Gufa*, sacred to Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of the god Shiva.

Another five kilometres' trek from Mana brings one to the glorious Yashodhara Falls. One can also trek to many other beautiful sites around.

Auli is 14km by road from Joshimath and is at an elevation of 9,500 feet above sea level. It is a wonderful resort which now hosts winter games (by Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam [GMVN]) and provides skiing facilities to tourists for IRs 1,500 for 10 days. Gorson, four kilometres from Auli, is a paradise for trekkers.

If one diverts from Govindhat (en route to Badrinath), a 14km trek brings one to Ghangaria. Another 14km trek brings one to the enchanting Valley of Flowers. A five kilometre trek on a different route from Ghangaria leads one to Hemkund Sahib which has the Laxman Temple and Hemkund Sahib *Gurudwara* and is situated on the bank of Hemkund Lake at a height of 4,320masl.

Government Plans and Efforts in Badrinath Zone

Today, the description of selected government plans is only of academic relevance. There is a complete breakdown of the institutional basis for executing any planned scheme.

Skiing as a Means of Extending the Tourist Season

The Government initiated the establishment of a Skiing Centre at Auli. Apart from the preliminary capital investment which was made over the last plan period, in the first two years, the state offered subsidies for training (US\$ 10 for a week's course of US\$ 60). In the third year, a considerable marketing effort was required to conduct the training programme. Given the fact that tourists, and particularly adventure tourists, come so close, it would be worthwhile to investigate the possibility of encouraging some of them to trek in the Badrinath Valley during this period. In the long run, when skiing picks up, there is a likelihood that there will be waiting periods for equipment, which

is expensive for individuals to own. Trekking in the region could provide an alternative.

Preparatory Work for Botanical Tours

The biodiversity of the Badrinath Zone's high altitudes is remarkable, and there are very few technologies and plant cultivation practices that have been standardised. The Government's scheme to promote botanical tours to the region could help gain an in-depth understanding which can pave the way for developing and designing appropriate strategies for regeneration of high altitude flora.

Improvement of Civic Amenities

The Government proposes to undertake the improvement of civic amenities in Joshimath *tehsil* on a priority basis. Under a special central government scheme, improvements are constantly being carried out at Badrinath.