time working in their fields so that many of the houses we visited were empty. There was also the problem of leeches, common in the monsoon season above 5,000 feet. All these factors probably conspired to make our initial fieldwork more localized than we had previously envisaged.

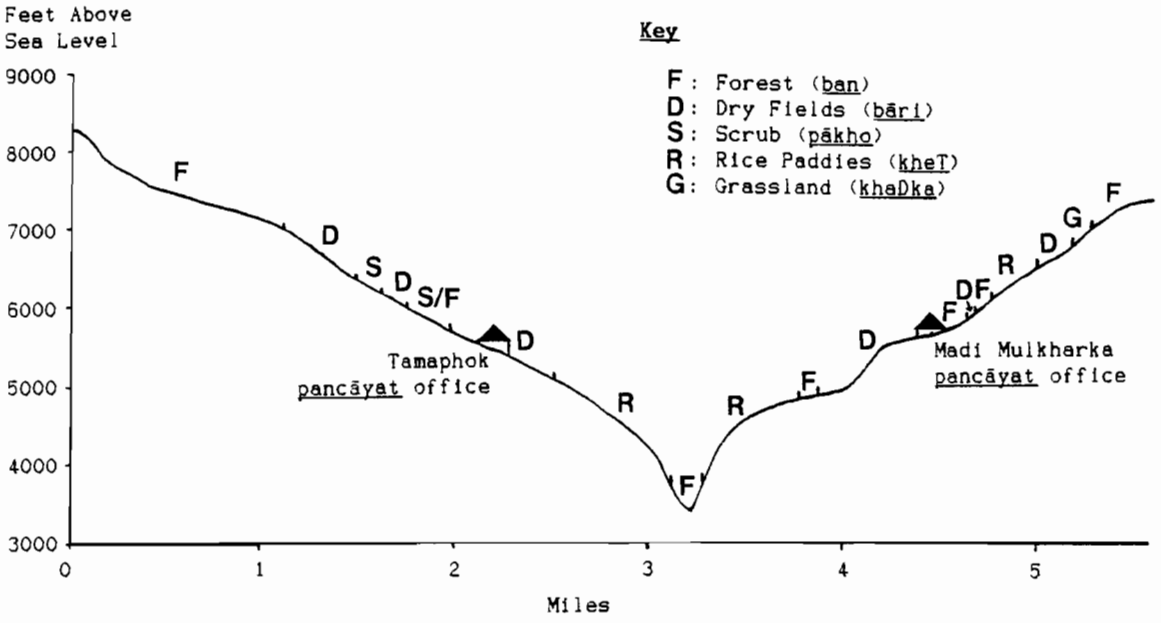


Fig. 1.1 Transect of Maya Khola Valley, SSW - NNE, between Tamaphok and Madi Mulkharka, showing elevation and predominant land-use (derived from KHARDEP Forest/Land-Use maps 6 & 10)

A Home of our Own

I am not sure our family appreciated quite what they were letting themselves in for when they offered us a room in their house. *Apa* seemed to think we would be using their house as a base for our visits to other Yakha communities in the area, which made sense in the light of our expressed research interest in learning about Yakha language and customs. We, however, wanted an in-depth acquaintance with the Yakha community of Tamaphok. *Apa* wanted no money for our board and lodging, but I insisted on thrusting an envelope containing NRs 200 (about £4) a

2·7% per year, with a doubling time, if those rates are maintained, of 27 years (Goldstein 1983). In 1960 the population had already trebled since 1850 (Macfarlane 1976:292). The estimated increase in population size since 1911 is shown graphically in Fig. 2.1. Banister and Thapa (1981) estimate that the population was 15 million in February 1983, and that by the year 2000, assuming the current trends continue, it will be between 23·7 and 25 million. Macfarlane (1968) is critical of anthropologists for not according population change sufficient weight in their analyses. He argues that population has to be seen as a determinant of social and mental structures as well as being determined by them, and suggests that "it is demographic fluctuations which underlie many of the social and economic changes in the area" (1976:8).

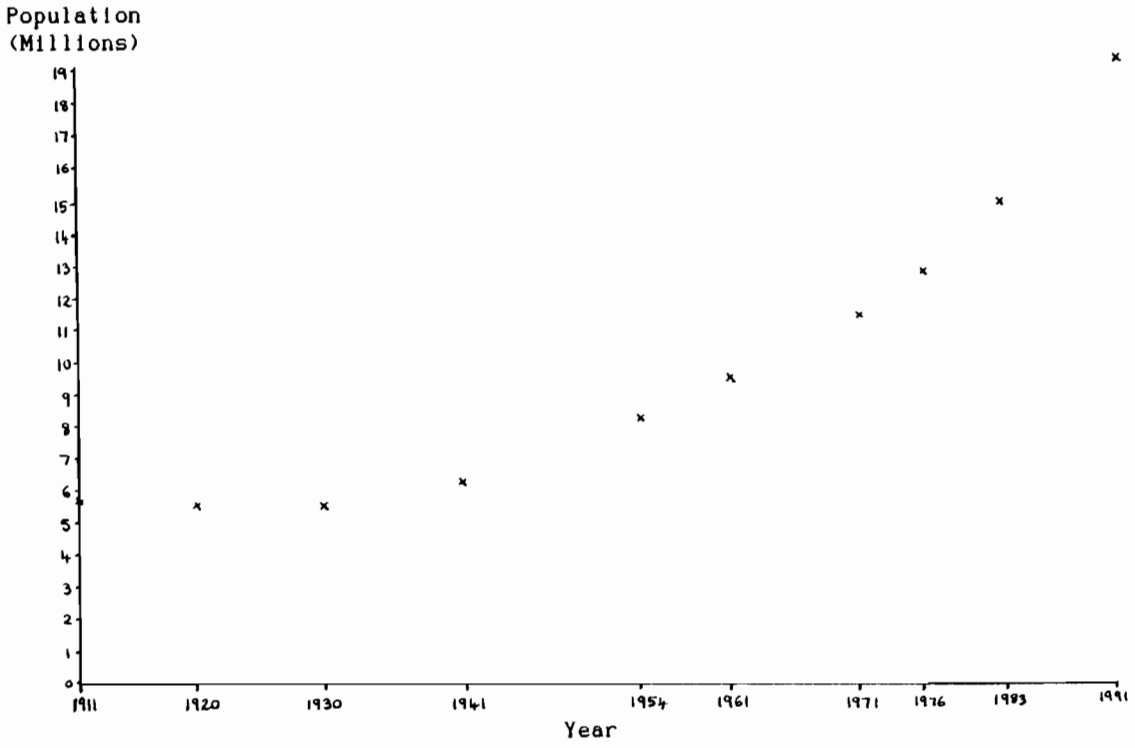


Fig. 2.1 Estimated Population Growth Rate of Nepal Since 1911

Poffenberger (1980) sees a direct and negative impact of population growth on agriculture and the resource situation in general. The effects of population on food supplies have been calculated by Seddon (1983). According to him, grain availability in the country as a whole moved from a surplus of 66,921 tonnes in 1971 to a deficit of 108,278 tonnes ten years later. Estimates of population density against food supply indicate that, from 1971 figures, only four out of 36 districts in the middle hills of Nepal were in any sense 'underpopulated' (Map 6). Tuladhar (1977) made the point that in 1971 hill and mountain Nepal had a population density per unit of arable land greater than that of Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country in which double and triple cropping practices are more feasible and land is generally more productive than is the case in large parts of Nepal. The total annual per capita agricultural production for Nepal between 1966 and 1977, as calculated by Banister and Thapa (1981), is shown in Fig. 2.2.

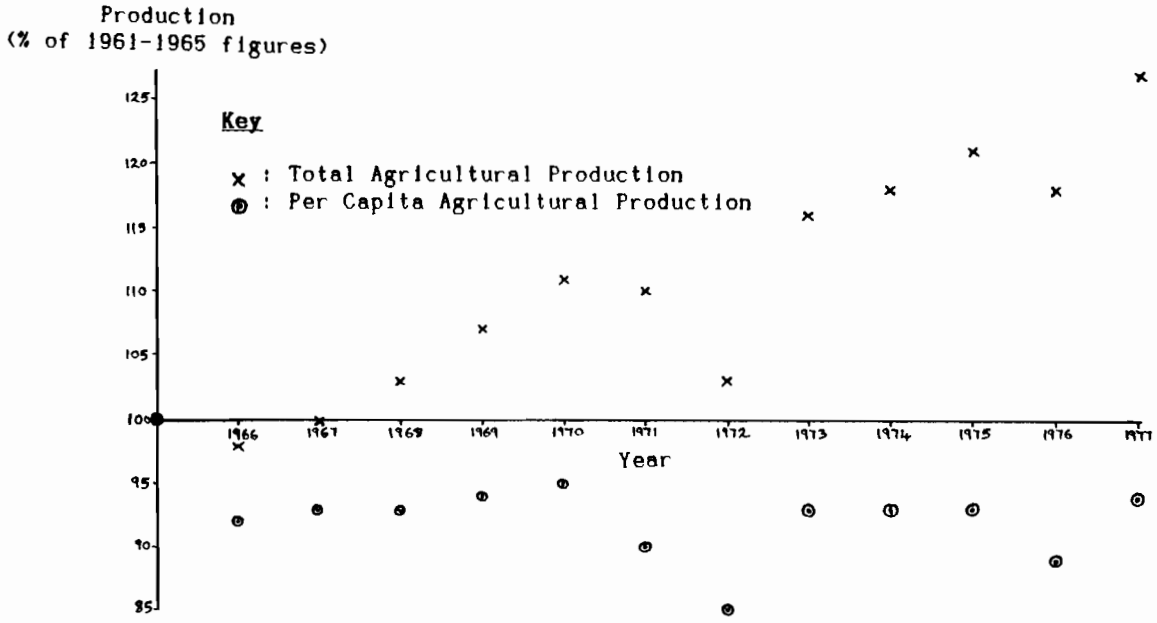


Fig. 2.2 Total Annual and Per Capita Agricultural Production, Nepal, 1966-77 (from Banister and Thapa, 1981)

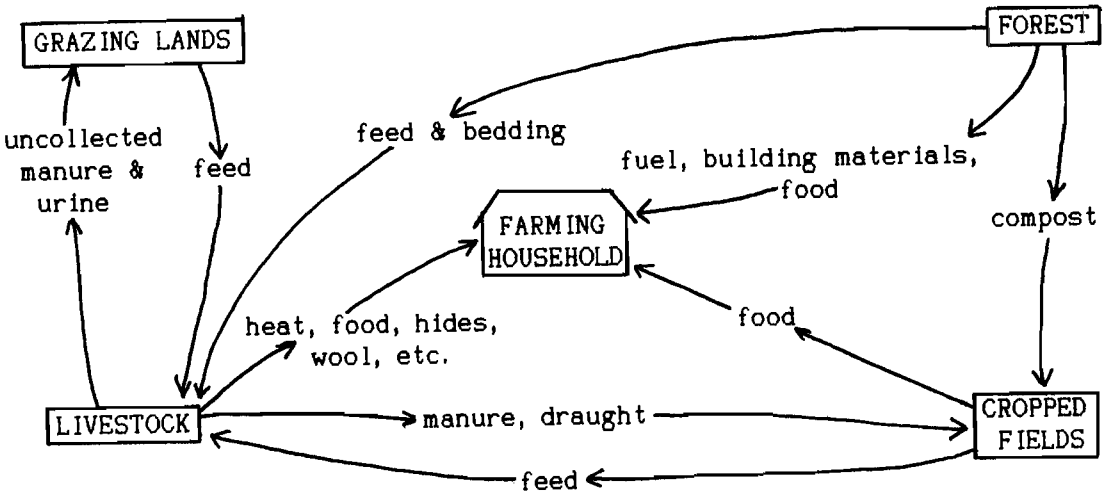


Fig. 2.3: Nepalese Hill Agricultural 'Environment' from a Systems Perspective

temporal dimension. Assuming the 'environment' to be socially constructed, we need first to ask how the term 'environment' translates in the different cultural context. This was a major problem in the Yakha case, since there was no word in the Yakha language which even approximated the meanings we associate with the term 'environment' in English. The closest equivalent was probably the Nepali varipari. This, when used as a noun, could be broadly translated by the English 'surroundings'.[5].

The Yakha would want to include in varipari the spirit world (see Chapter Four), other ethnic groups (à la Barth - see Chapter Three) and also other Yakha clans, lineages and family members with whom they might interact (Chapter Five). For them, the environment was thus intensely 'social', much more so than the 'farming household' in the diagram above

neighbouring Mechi zone) recorded by Weidert and Subba (1985:8).[4] More research could usefully be done on the history and identity of these groups.

Further afield, Yakha were also to be found in northeast India, Sikkim, Bhutan and elsewhere. Some had migrated to other parts of Nepal, there were male migrant workers in the Middle East, and other Yakha men were engaged in army service in India, Hong Kong, Brunei and the U.K., sometimes with their families (see Chapter Seven). Weidert and Subba raise the intriguing possibility that there might be Limbu located in Burma (1985:7). There is no reason why Yakha should not also be found there, and indeed, one man in Tamaphok claimed that this was the case, their presence dating from wartime and post-war service in the British army. We also heard of one Yakha man from Dandagaon who, after retiring from the Indian army, had gone to live in Malaysia.

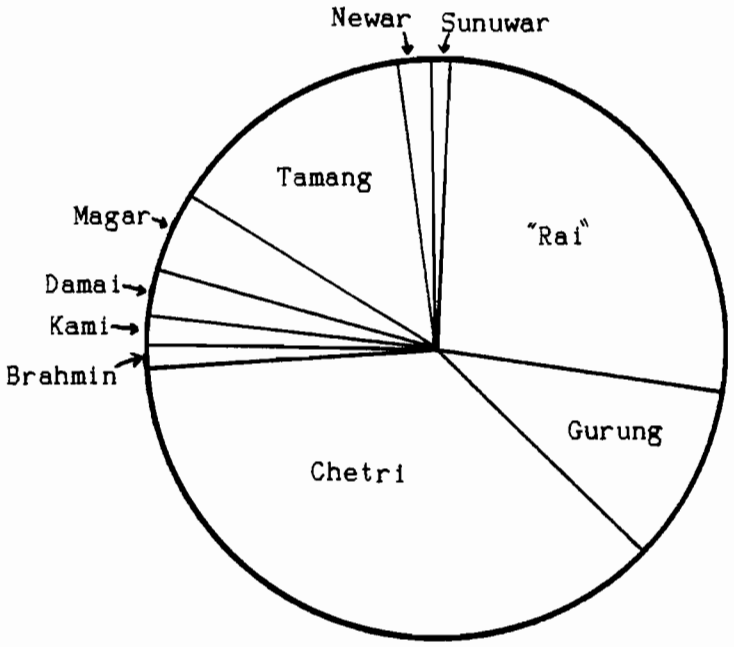


Fig. 3.2: Ethnic Breakdown of Tamaphok Pancāyat by Household

1,000 (about £20), and the cost of a fully grown phul-pāti buffalo had risen dramatically, so that it was now prohibitive for any single individual to buy (hence the baijo system, see below). The increasing costs of the phul-pāti buffaloes for the baijo with which our family was involved are shown in Fig. 3.3.

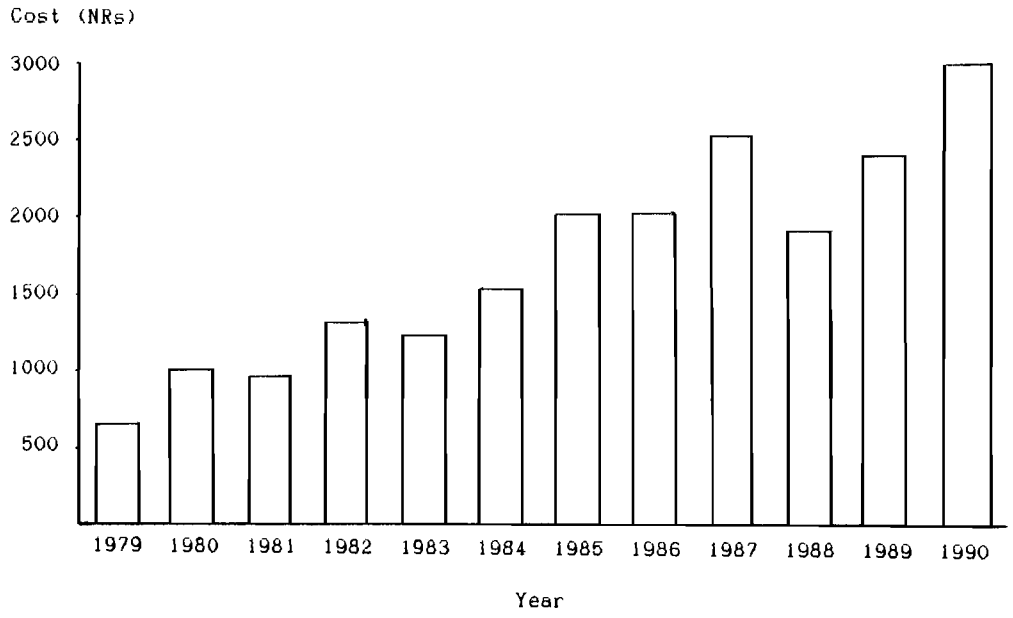


Fig. 3.3: Price increase of buffalo baijo through time

Apart from the expense of buffalo, the lack of interest in dairy products may again have been influential. If there was no reason to keep buffalo apart from their meat, then there was only a single incentive to keep such large, relatively high-risk animals. It was easier to purchase them from outside Tamaphok when needed, from castes such as Chetri who kept them for milk but could not eat them. In return, our family took advantage of the shortage of goats amongst the Brahmins and Chetris during Dasai~ by selling them goats they had reared

Sagant (1976:58) admits that "in the field, the distinction between them is not apparent, and in certain circumstances the functions of the two priests coincide" (cf. Allen 1976a).

For the Yakha, distinctions were recognized, but these were seen as deriving from the different traditions. Thus the bijuwā was seen as coming from the Rai, and the *chāmba* from the Limbu. Another difference was the types of ritual paraphernalia used. Jhā~krī and bijuwā were said to wear feathers and dance beating a little drum (Dhyā~gro) or a plate (thāl). Both these are associated with trance and spirit possession. In Dandagaon we saw a carved post with two sticks pushed crossways through it which we were told was a murā, the sign of a bijuwā's house (see Fig. 4.1). We did not see such a symbol in Tamaphok, however.

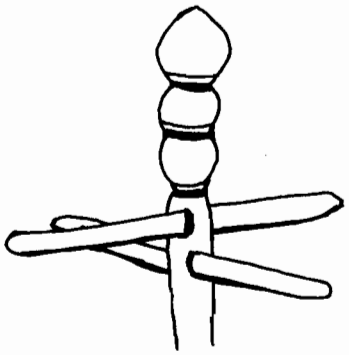


Fig. 4.1 Murā seen in Dandagaon

A *māŋaŋba*, on the other hand, was said not to play a plate, and may have been synonymous with the Limbu *phedaŋma*. This is interesting because in some Limbu dialects there is a word *mangba* (Jones, 1976) or *maŋde·mba* (Weidert & Subba 1985) which seems to be associated with the performance of rituals to deal with evil spirits (the result of 'bad

whitewash in painting their houses, and for Brahmin and Chetri families to colour theirs with red clay. It was important to endeavour to renew this whitewash periodically. This was generally done at Dasai~. As the festival approached, a house which was not whitewashed was pointed out to me with disdain as indicating the obvious poverty of the people within. In addition to whitewash, many Yakha who could afford the paint to do so were fond of decorating the white walls with floral motifs (Plates 5 & 19).

A wooden verandah about two feet wide ran all round the upper storey, with geraniums, planted in old oil cans, decorating the front of it. Another particularly distinctive feature of Yakha house decoration was the maize cobs hung in a fringe along the eaves of the house. There was a tile roof above (a mark of wealth: many houses just had grass thatch) under which there was an attic, marked from the front by a small window closed, like all the rest, with wooden shutters.

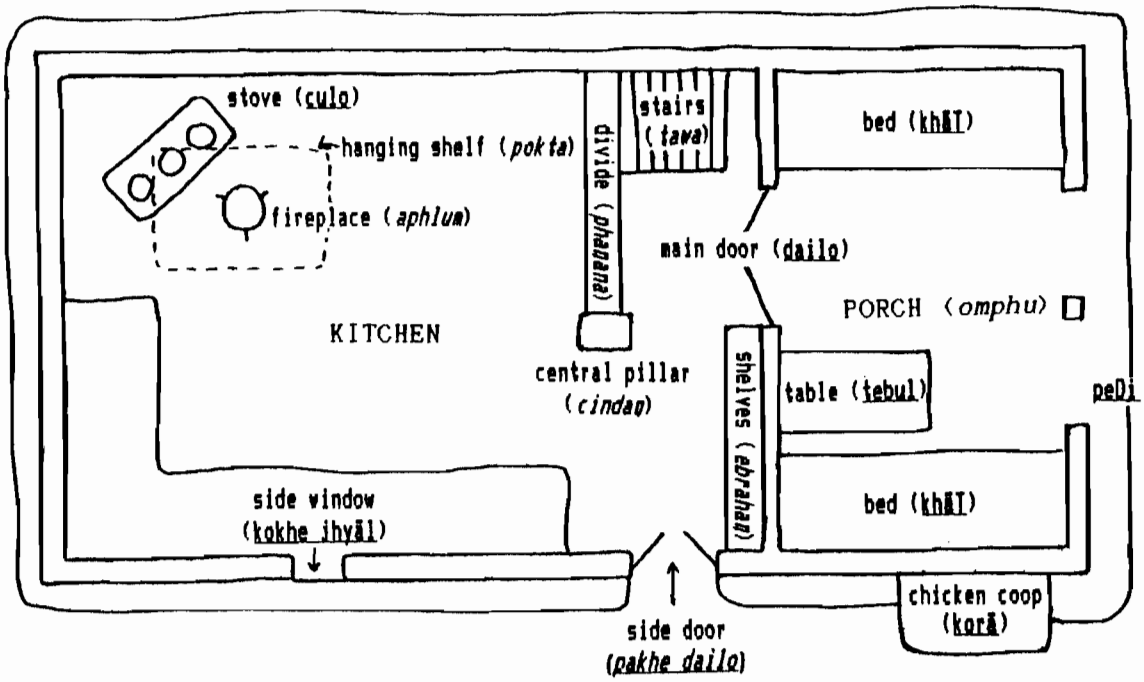
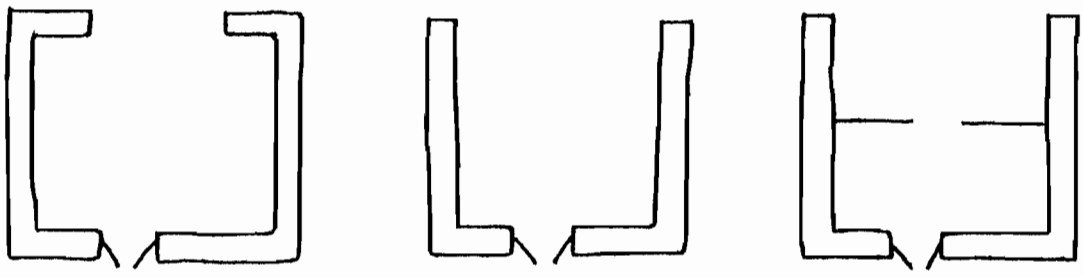


Fig. 5.1 Ground Floor Plan of Yakha House

The Porch

The porch (*omphu*) mediated relationships between the inhabitants of the house and the world outside. While relatives from other houses might enter through the side entrance, less familiar visitors were generally expected to come and conduct their business by way of the porch. It was important that they took the design of the porch, and their own caste status, into account in deciding how they would do this.

There were three types of porch, bhitrai *omphu*, khulā *omphu* and bāhira *omphu* (Fig. 5.2).



① Bhitrai *omphu* ② Khulā *omphu* ③ Bāhira *omphu*

Fig. 5.2 Types of Porch

Bhitrai *omphu* meant 'enclosed porch', while khulā *omphu* meant 'open porch'. The difference between the two (which it took us some time to realise, so insignificant did it at first appear to us as outsiders) was that in a bhitrai *omphu* the wall extended round the two outer corners or the porch, while in the case of the khulā *omphu* there was no such 'enclosing' wall. This made a profound difference to visitors of other castes, since lower castes were not supposed to sit inside a bhitrai

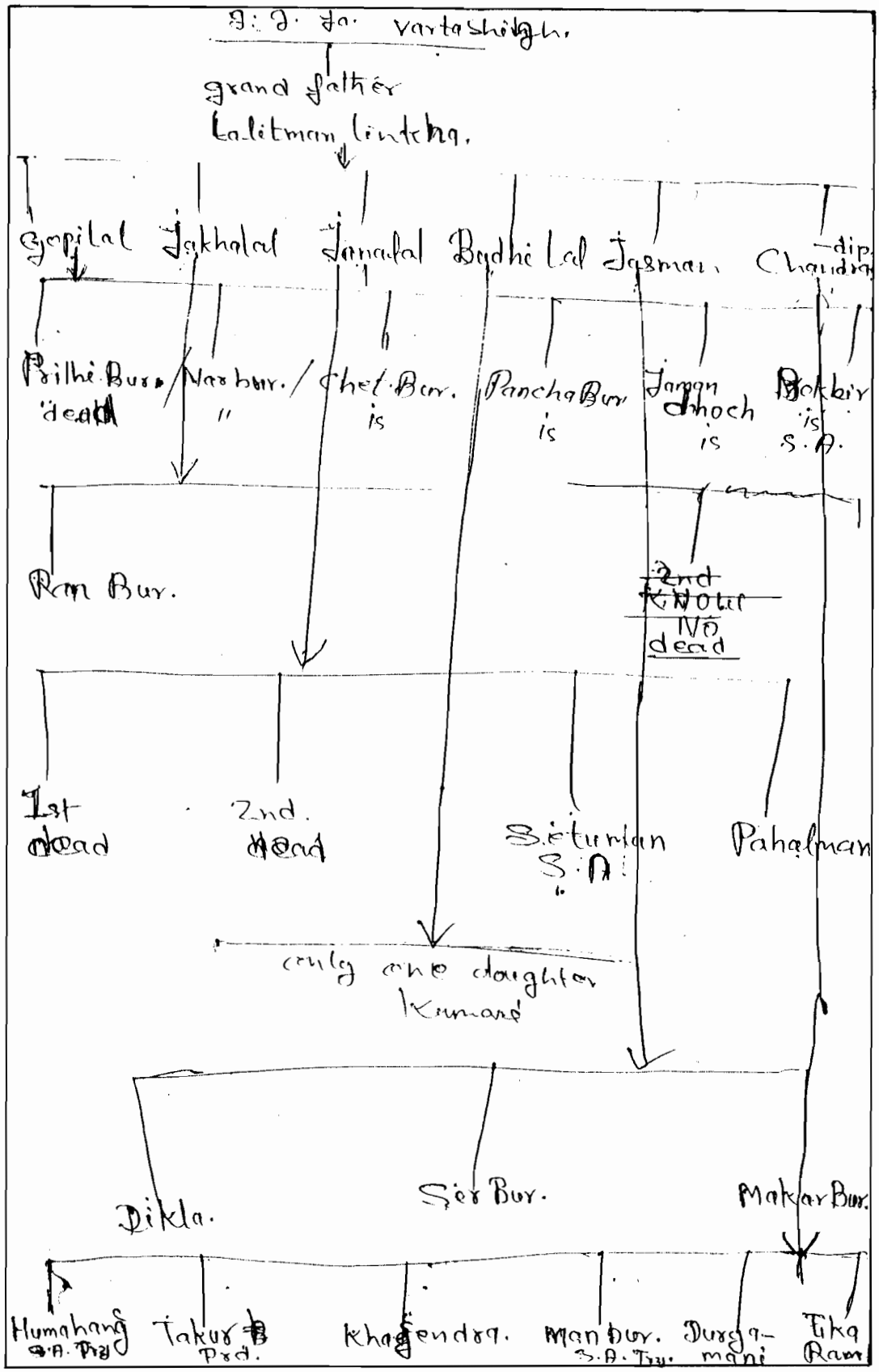


Fig. 5.4 Family Tree from Vartasing According to Kamala