CHAPTER V

Numerology in the Indian System of Human Marks

Having surveyed the history and development of the different transmissions of the human marks, we shall now explore more closely forms of the marks known from the time of the Vālmīki’s Epic Rāmāyana, the Buddhist Pāli Canon, and the Jyotiṣa of Garga. It is a unique form of the Indian system of human marks, which involved a type of numerology of body parts and pertained only to men. Although the numerology discussed in this chapter does not involve a kind of mysticism of numbers as occurs for example in the Hebrew Kabbalah, it does use numbers for divination, as is often found in other numerological systems. Moreover, it seems to have had the function of a mnemonic device for learning the principal parts of the human body.

The employment of numbers in the Indian system of human marks occurs in two specific forms: a non-fixed and a fixed number of marks or body parts, with the total number of both having approximately one hundred following the formulation from the Gārgīyajyotiṣa.1 The two forms share characteristics that indicate perhaps cross-fertilisation and mutual influence. In terms of organisation, the second is more systematic than the first, and, thus, following Kohlbrugger’s chronological reasoning, would appear to be the more recent. Therefore, our discussion will begin with the earliest, non-fixed form followed by the later, fixed number of body parts. The chapter will conclude with an examination of numerical physiognomy in the Buddhist tradition and its relationship to brahmanic śāstric forms.

My method of presentation involves an introduction followed by a detailed discussion of each systematic formulation. The introduction provides an overview and analysis of the material. In order to minimise repetition, the discussion will include a summary of the contents in the form of lists of marks. The full text, translation and notes for most of the passages are found below in Parts II and Vol. 2. Those passages not found in these parts occur as an appendix to this chapter.

I Non-fixed Number of Marks or Body Parts

Four principal sources make up the material for the study of this form of numerical marks: Rāmāyana, Sundarakāṇḍa 33.17–19, Gārgīyajyotiṣa 1.1–7, Agnipu-

1 See Garga 1.16 and notes to translation.
Although the actual number of body parts grouped in particular sets is not fixed and range from one to fourteen, the majority of sets of parts cluster around the numbers three and four, which are perhaps the quantities most easily remembered. Hence, this form of arranging of protases is based on the numerical ordering of body parts. Its earliest representation occurs in the epic known as Vālmiki’s Rāmāyaṇa, which most authorities would date from before the sixth and not after the second century BCE. Its original source is not mentioned in the epic, but in the versions found in the Gārgiyayotiṣa, it is attributed to Samudra. The least systematic presentation occurs in the Rāmāyaṇa, while the most systematic forms are found in the Gārgiyayotiṣa and Purāṇas. All versions treat not only the gross body parts, but also other human traits, such as character, behaviour, sense functions, and intelligence. In this way, it provides a comprehensive picture of an ideal man from the princely realm.

**Rāmāyaṇa, Sundarakāṇḍa 33.17–19**

Because the passage from the Vālmikirāmāyaṇa is not found in a clearly defined section devoted exclusively to the system of human marks, it provides an example of the human marks as it may have occurred in practice. Moreover, it offers only the specific number and characteristic of the protasis without specifying its individual bodily parts. The reason for its inclusion at this place in the epic is that the monkey-king Hanuman needed a means to distinguish Rāma from his brother Lakṣmaṇa. Since Rāma is a Kṣatriya, destined to become ruler, he necessarily possesses the bodily marks of a king; by contrast, Lakṣmaṇa should lack them. Offering such a catalogue of human marks to Hanuman gave him a way to identify Rāma. The inclusion of this passage in the Rāmāyaṇa could represent an example of one of the oldest versions of the human marks. It was aimed at men from the princely class and was used to determine the heir apparent. The appendix to this chapter provides the text, translation, and notes for these verses, and for the sake of completeness, a rendering of all the available commentaries, which fill in the missing anatomical details in different ways. Here, we shall represent the verses in the form of a list of the numbered parts. Those in brackets are unfortunately not included in the text of the critical edition.

1. three fixed
2. three pendulous
3. three uniform (dup)
4. three raised (dup)
5. three copper coloured