CHAPTER 7

THE ANTIQUITY OF RASA-CONCEPT
(3) अग्रादन्व विश्वाय गुण रेग ध्रवे रसायः ।

It says the word rasa is used for Nātyarasaas like  अग्रादन्व etc. For poison, for virile semen of the body, for sense qualities and for liquid.

(4) अग्रादन्वकरुकारुकाद्भुता-मेयाभयानानान्-विभेदते-

Here the word rasa is used in the sense of different types of Nātyarasaas.

Rasa in Vedic Literature

Now let us see briefly the occurrences of the word rasa in the vedic literature.

At Rv., VIII. 49.2, Viśakhaśa Sukta, we have rasa explained as 'Jalāni'. Waters are termed as the rasas of mountains. Here we see that the waters of the springs that flow from the mountains are regarded as the cap of the mountains, which is extracted from them by Indra, and becomes water. Here, the word rasa is used in the double sense of the extracted sap and water.

3 Ibid., I, 226, p.339.
4 Ibid., I, 17, p.45.
5 For all these references, I am indebted to Dr. T.S. Handi's book, The Origin and Development of the Theory of Rasā and Vajra in Sanskrit Poetics (Ahmedabad, Gujarat University, 1973), pp.192-203.
In Yv. 9.3, we have 'āpah rasah' and also 'āpah rasasya yo rasah'. These are explained by both Uvata and Mahīdhara as Vāyu and Prajāpati respectively. Here the word rasa seems to carry, the sense of essence or soul and consequently the presiding deity. The same sense is repeated at Yv. 19.44, 20.22, and 31.17.

Then we have rasa in the sense of the rasa of herbs. This may be in the form of an extracted juice as in case of some or may be just sap in some plant. In the IX Mandala of the Rgveda we have the word in the sense of extracted juice.

Rv. I, 187.4.5, have 'rasaḥ' explained by Sāyana as the six tastes such as sweet, sour, etc., rasaḥ later on became the sense qualities of taste in the Indian Saranams. In Yv. 39.4, we have rasa in the same sense and is explained by Mahīdhara as 'śvādutvāḥ'. The word rasa is also used along with urjā, sunṛta and payas wherein urjā may mean strength or vigour either of speech or body. Sunṛta may mean the sweet and true speech and, payas may mean any fluid, juice or vital spirit. In this context, rasa may also be taken in a similar connotation as the best or finest or prime part of anything, essence etc. It might also mean taste or charm, pleasure or delight.

In Av. 2.3.44, 'rasana trptah' the word rasa may
mean the essence of the universe and the sense of satisfaction or fulfilment or even ecstasy is associated with it - rasa as causing fulfilment or joy. In Rv. ix.6.6 the same context associates rasa with feelings as causing joy, exhilaration, ecstasy or intoxication in 'rasa-madhya' 'rasa vyah payasah here means 'asvadyah' tasteful, having flavour etc.

Thus in the Vedas, we get rasa, not only in the physical sense, but we find the qualities of joy-giving tastefulness exhilaration, being the essence of Vedas, being the essence of the universe etc. also attached to rasa. "These senses make it very easy for the aesthetes to utilise the word for the aesthetic flavour of sentiments and emotions as found in literature."6

Rasa in Upanisads

We come across several occurrences of the word rasa or the different forms of the root Vas in the Upanisads. Mainly they are to be seen in two or three different senses. The meaning of liquid seems to be common to all. In the

6 Ibid., p.196.
objects of five sense organs, that which is perceived by the tongue is called rasa. We come across this sense in the 'Prāṇopanisad' (4.8) which says: 'rasas ca rasayitavyah' i.e. 'when there is taste, it is to be tasted'. So also in the 'Bṛ. Upanisad' "Sa Yātha caindhavanamantarabhyah ārttana rasāghana eva". (4.5.13). "Just as a piece of caindhava salt has nothing like the internal or the external, but the whole of it is full of taste." Here rasa is taken in the sense of taste.

Then rasa is seen in the sense of the juices of the trees out of which honey is formed as in the 'Chāṇḍogya Upanisad' (6.9.1)

"yathā soma madhu madhikrto nististhanti.

naṁtyayānām vrkaṁ rasaṁ sa cāvahāramoktaṁ rasaṁ
gamayati."

Then we come across more and more occurrences in the sense of essence of things. e.g. in the 'Taittirīyopanisad' (1.12)

"esa bhūtānām prthivā rasaḥ, prthivā āpo rasaḥ

asēmaś ca dhyayo rasaḥ ca dhīnām Purāṇaḥ rasaḥ Puruṣasya

Vāgrasah Vīco ugrasah roshaḥ sāma rasaḥ sāma udgītho rasaḥ"

Here, we have, along with the sense of essence other subtle shades of meanings of the word rasa. It should be noted here that the number of rasas is eight and out of
these udgāthas is the highest and the eighth rasa.

We may also take note of the following from the 'Taittirīya Upanisad':

nasdvāḥ idamagnah ēṣit tato vā sadajāyata.
tadātmānam svayamakurute tassattatsukṛtamucyate
iti. Yadvai sukṛtaḥ. rasa vai saḥ. rasaḥ hyevyayai
labdhavānabhi bhavati'. (2.7)
i.e. "verily in the beginning was this asat (i.e. Jagat).
From it, verily was cat born. It made itself the Ātmā so
it is termed sukṛta. Verily it is sukṛta. Verily it is rasa.
On the attainment of rasa, this verily becomes joyous."

In this reference, sukṛta is rasa and that rasa
is a joy giving factor becomes clear. This usage may be an
original inspiration for later theorists of Rasa.

Rasa in the Mirukta

In the Mirukta of Yāsaka (circa 700-500 B.C.) we come
across rasa in the sense of the name of a particular river or
a river in general and the word rasa seems to carry the same
sense as that of 'to make sound', or 'juice', etc.

According to the old tradition, Mantrās and Brāhmaṇas
including Aranyakas and Upaniṣads, constitute veda
Thus we have uptill now considered the references in vedic literature. We have also considered Nirukta of Yāsaka, which is an exegeses on Nighantu-collection of words, used in vedic literature. In these references we do find several suggestions which must have influenced the later rasa concept as said before. But we nowhere find a reference to rasa in its technical sense as propounded in the Na.

So we have to look for this technical sense of the word rasa, in post vedic sanskrit literature. The great grammarian Pānini has regulated sanskrit speech in his work 'Aṣṭādhyāyī'. This work has an occurrence of the word rasa in a sense very much akin to the sense of the use of that word in the Na.

Rasa in Pāṇini

The 'Aṣṭādhyāyī' of Pāṇini is in the form of sūtras more or less laconic. This work is traditionally studied or understood in the light of the vārttikas of Kātyāyana and the 'Vyākaranā Mahābhāṣya' of Patañjali. Most of these vārttikas are included in the 'Mahābhāṣya', and both of them

7 "Samtrabrahmanoyorvedanāmadheyām" - Pandit A. Chinnasvāmi Sastri Apastambaśūtras (Benares: Kasi Sanskrit Series, 1923), 31.
explain and teach the system of Panini's Grammar. 8

To place this concept of the word rasa, in its specific sense of mental experience or perception of beauty, in its probable time order, we have to digress a little to consider the chronology of Panini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali.

Date of Panini

The problem of the date of these ancient writers has always occupied the scholars and they offer different views about it; however, in the case of Patañjali, the author of 'Mahābhāṣya', we have on the whole, an unanimously accepted date. It was the late Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar, the doyen of Sanskritists who attempted to settle the time of Patañjali. In an article published in 'Indian Antiquary' Vol. I, 1972, pp.298-F, he discusses this question and comes to the conclusion that Patañjali "Probably wrote the third

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8 After dealing, albeit briefly, how Kātyāyana and Patañjali dealt with the Śūtras of Panini, Dr. R.G. Bhandarkar says, "The only tenable theory is that Kātyāyana's work is an edition of Panini, with notes explanatory, critical and supplementary, and that Patañjali's is a commentary on this edition, explaining in detail the notes of Kātyāyana, but discussing at length all points connected with the system of Panini and with grammar generally, whether Kātyāyana notices them or not in a manner favourable or otherwise to his author. The object of both was the same, viz., to teach grammar by following and explaining the system of Panini."

From: The collected works of Bhandarkar (Poona: B.O.R.I., 1933), I, p.147.
chapter of his 'Bhāṣya' between 144 B.C. and 142 B.C. And this agrees with the conclusion drawn by Prof. Goldstucker from a statement in the other part of his work that the author of the 'Mahābhāṣya' flourished after the Maurya dynasty was extinct. Since all the passages, and the different historical events, point to lead us to about the same period, the date of Patañjali, so derived must be regarded as trustworthy, and in the history of Sanskrit literature it is of great importance.9

There was a great controversy about this finding of Bhandarkar between him and Weber and some other Western scholars.10

Dr. Bhandarkar summarises his views on the chronological relation between Pāṇini, Kātyāyana and Patañjali as follows: "A sufficiently long time, therefore must have elapsed between Kātyāyana and Patañjali to give rise to these variants or amendments. I am therefore inclined to accept the popular

9 Also republished in The Collected Works of Bhandarkar, I, pp.103-114.

10 Ref. "The question of Patañjali's date was a subject of prolonged controversy between Weber on one side and Goldstucker and Bhandarkar on the other. Ultimately, Weber was constrained to admit the substantial validity of his opponent's arguments (History of Indian Literature, 2nd ed., Trubner, 1882, p.24); and no doubt now remains that the date of Patañjali is fixed to 150-140 B.C. in round numbers."
tradition which refers Kātyāyana to the time of the Maṇḍasyas who preceded the Mauryas and to assign to him the first half of the 4th century before Christ. In this manner the interval between Kātyāyana and Patañjali was about two hundred years. Prof. Goldstucker has shown from an examination of the vārtikas that certain grammatical forms are not noticed by Pāṇini but are taught by Kātyāyana and concludes that they did not exist in the language in Pāṇini's time. I have followed up the argument in my lecture11 on the Sanskrit and Prakrit language and given from the vārtikas several ordinary instances of such forms. "... No less an interval of time than about three centuries can account for all these circumstances. Pāṇini, therefore, must have flourished in the beginning of the 7th century before the Christian Era if not earlier still; and against this conclusion, I believe, no argument has been or can be brought except a vague prejudice."

In spite of this there have been controversies about the date of Kātyāyana and Pāṇini. According to Keith, the date for the composition of the work Mahābhāṣya is circa 150 to 149 B.C. However, he puts Kātyāyana in 250-200 B.C.

11 Bhandarkar, op. cit., IV, p.588,D.
and Pāṇini in circa 350 B.C.  

The latest contribution regarding the date of Pāṇini is that of Dr. Agrawal. He says,

"We may now summarise these considerations. The various dates assigned by scholars to Pāṇini range from the seventh to the fourth century B.C. The majority of scholars are inclined towards the fifth and the fourth century B.C. The view taken in this work is that a date nearer the fifth century B.C. appears more probable on the basis of the available data. It takes Pāṇini to be a contemporary of the Nanda King named Mahānandā and thus assigning him to middle of the Fifth Century B.C.

We may adopt the date given by Dr. Agrawal and place Pāṇini in the 5th Century B.C.

Rasa in Pāṇini's 'Āstādhyāyī'

The word rasa occurs in Pāṇini's 'Āstādhyāyī' in the Sūtra 'rasāśībhyaścena' (pā v.2.35). We have to find now exactly in what specific sense the word rasa is used by Pāṇini in this Sūtra.

This Sūtra is related to the previous Sūtra which is -


It says that the matup is affixed to substantive to show that 'it belongs to this - it is in this'. It means matup affix is applied to show possessive relations.

This sutra is followed by the sutra 'rasādbhyāsā' - that is matup class of affixes is applied to rasa etc. also.

Patañjali begins his bhāṣya on this sutra with an objection - 'what is the purpose of stating this? Does not 'it belongs to this - it lies in this' of the previous sutra hold good here? We can say that if it holds good here, its repetition would be useless.

In answer, Patañjali quotes a vārttika - "The repetition of rasādi is for the purpose of prevention of others."

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16 According to Kale's Sanskrit Grammar, this matup or mat is a general, technical term, indicating all possessive affixes, such as mat, vat, in, it etc. They are added to a noun in the sense of possessed by or residing in i.e. "Devadatta-gomāna" or "Kairino vṛkṣekah" - A person named Devadatta owning cows or a mountain having trees on it.


and then explains the Vārttika as follows: "The repetition of rasa etc. is made for the purpose of negation of other matvartthiyas (matup affixes). Just as matup would necessarily hold good here, those other affixes which would hold good here, should not hold good here."

After thus explaining the Vārttika, Patanjali says,

"This is not the purpose here, because other matup are found applied after rasa, etc."

and he cites the illustrations "rasaiko nāṭah, urvaśī vai rūpi-
ṇī saparamā, pariṣte rasaiko vāyuritā." instances in which 'Ik' and 'In' affixes are applied.

In those instances, it is clear that rasa, rūpa, and sāra are not used in the other known meaning of sense...

19 Ibid., p.394.
20 Ibid., p.394

The 'Kāśikā', the earliest extant commentary on Pāṇini gives an alternative explanation as to why this sūtra 'rasaṁdibhyasā' is justified. It says "sthava gunt-iti-stra Paṭhāya-te, ten ye rasasamā rāddārya guntaseṣṭhātra Paṭhāh.

The mā bhute"- or, here one should read guntit also, on account of rasa etc. being gunes. So here gune are those, which are perceived by the senses of taste etc. This meaning (of the sense qualities) is not to be taken".


The term guna means qualities in the sense of attributes or qualifications and the sense qualities such as smell, touch, etc. These are dravyas or substances.
qualities. As far as Patanjali is concerned, we can be positive in saying that the specific meaning of the words rasa rūpa, etc. as a mental experience or perception of beauty is familiar to him. This means that the words rasa rūpa etc. were current in this aesthetic sense of mental experience or perception of beauty in the age of Patanjali and may be even earlier. From this, it necessarily follows that Patanjali takes the word rasādi in the sūtra as having a mental significance.

Our this view is supported by 'āśīkā', the earliest extant commentary (circa 7th cen. A.D.) on Pāṇini's 'Aṣṭādhvyāyi'. In the illustration 'rūpiḥ kanyā, rūpiḥ dānakah', it takes rūpa to mean śobhā (beauty-loveliness), and rūpiḥ-śobhāyayataḥ - possessing śobhā or beauty, and in 'rasādi nātak' rasa to mean bhāva (a mental state) and rasādi - bhāvayoga - possessing bhāva, or putting on bhāva or performance of bhāva.

Even a later commentary, 'Tattvabodhinī' (17th cen. A.D.) on the 'Siddhānta-Kumārī' takes the word śobhā to mean saumandaryāḥ - beauty. In the 'Tattvabodhinī', the author Jñānānanda Sarasvatī says,

21 Ibid., p.298.
From this reference it is clear that they use the word *rasa* in its aesthetic sense.

As we said in the beginning, the meaning of the sūtras of Pāṇini's 'Astādhyāyi', can only be properly understood with the aid of vṛttikas, 'Mahābhāṣya' and later commentaries like 'Kālikā' and others. We have seen from the above references that consistently in the tradition of Pāṇinian Grammar race is interpreted as an aesthetic characteristic with reference to this sūtra 'rasādibhyasaśca'. So, unless a different interpretation is brought forward, we would not be wrong in saying that in the sūtra 'rasādibhyasaśca', Pāṇini also uses the word *rasa* in the aesthetic sense.²²


²³ On the basis of the 'Sanapātha', 'Siddhānta Kaumudi', 7th ed., (Bombay: NBP. 1963, No. 166, p.454), - 'rasa-rūpa-varna-galāna-sparśa-badha-anēha-bhāva. Gurnēt eksec iti rasādi' - We assume that Pāṇini is most probably familiar with the meaning of the word guṇa as sense qualities. It is to exclude those sense qualities that Pāṇini has given the sūtra 'rasādibhyasaśca'.

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... rūpinī kanyā, racikā nātaḥ iti ....

rūpinī ityatra tu rupaśabdena saundaryaśa
gṛhyate .... racikā ityatra tu rasaśabdena
bhāvo gṛhyate na tu rasaṁgrañyaguna iti.²²

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As we have seen, Patañjali takes the meaning of rasādi in Pāṇinī's Sūtra as having aesthetic significance. But if the sense qualities of the word were meant in this Sūtra 'rasādibaḥyaḥ ca' Patañjali would not have given the instances of 'rasaikasvātah', etc. As we shall see later, Pāṇinī is familiar with some aspects of dramaturgy. His familiarity with some aspects of dramaturgy makes this aesthetic meaning quite logical, and easily acceptable.

Whatever may be the date of Pāṇinī, either the beginning of 7th century B.C. or the 4th Century B.C., it is evident that as early as 4th Century B.C. or earlier, the word rasā was also used in the aesthetic sense. We may passingly note that it was used in the same age or earlier, in which Aristotle used the word Catharsis in connection with tragedy.

Nātya and Nātasūtras in Pāṇinī

As the rasās are usually called Nātyarasas in the NŚ, we may as well consider here, three Sūtras of Pāṇinī about nātya and nātasūtras. The relevant Sūtras are as follows:

(1) Pārāśaryasāikādibhyāḥ bhikṣunātatasūtravah.

(Pā. IV.3.110)

24 See p. 153 of this study.
(2) Karmendakṛṣṭā śvādiniḥ

(Pā. IV. 3. 111)

(3) Chandogau{kthik}yājñika

bahiḥcanatānāyah

(Pā. IV. 3. 129)

These sūtras have not been commented on by Patanjali in his 'Shāṣṭya'. So in order to understand them, we must consult 'Kāśika'. 'Kāśika' tells us that the sūtra 110 is in the context of the use of the affix 'nimi' (tad), the sūtra 111, the affix 'ini (tad) and the sūtra 129 of 'nya'. Affix 'nimi' is applied to pārāśarya and bīlaḷī to form the nouns pārāśārīsa and bīlālīsa respectively. Pārāśāra composed a Bhikṣu sūtra and bīlaḷī composed a Nata sūtra.

The bhikṣus who studied the Bhikṣu sūtra of pārāśāra were known as 'pārāśarīna bhikṣavah' and the nata who studied the Nata sūtra of bīlaḷī as 'bīlālīna natah'.

The sūtra III tells us that the affix 'ini (tad) is applied to karmenda, krāṣava, with a similar significance. Karmenda composed a Bhikṣu sūtra and krāṣava a Nata sūtra.

The bhikṣus, who studied the Bhikṣu sūtra of Karmenda were known as 'karmendino bhikṣavah' and the nata, who studied the Nata sūtra of krāṣava as 'krāṣavino natah'.

25 Kāśika, op. cit., p. 245.
We may say, to put it differently, that the Pāṇinian sūtras 110 and 111 are meant to explain nouns like pārāśārīna, bīlāline, karmandina and kṛśāvina.

The sūtra 129 is in the context of the use of affix 'nya'. It is applied to words chandoga, sukthika, yājnikā bahvryca and nata, to form the nouns chāndogya, sukthikya, yājnikya, bahvroya and nātya. This affix is applied to indicate the dharma (duty), and ānāya (sāpradāya and sāstra - tradition). Accordingly, chāndogya will mean the dharma and ānāya of chandogas, yājnikya, the dharma and ānāya of yājnakas, etc. Similarly, nātya will mean the dharma and ānāya of natas.

Thus this sūtra is intended to shew the significance of chāndogya, yājnikya, nātya, etc.

In this connection, a doubt must have arisen about the propriety of associating nātya with chāndogya, yājnikya etc. The rule prescribed is that the affix 'nya' is to be applied when dharma and ānāya are to be indicated and those dharma and ānāya were related to a carma - a vedic school. Every Carma had its own dharma and ānāya, and when these were to be indicated the affix 'nya' would be applied. e.g. 'chandogenāna dharma va ānānyo va chāndogyah'.

26 Ibid., p. 247.
The chandogas had their carana but had the notas their carana, so that they may be entitled to dharma and āmāya and their affix ‘nya?

The ‘Kāśiśa' explains this by saying, "sānāyaḥ dharmaṃ āmaṇāyaḥ tat sāhacaryat nataśabdād - api dharmaṃ āmaṇāyor eva bhavati". It says, because of sāhacaraya-association dharma and āmāya hold good for nātya also. It means in this particular sūtra, Pāṇini has associated nata with chandogas etc. on account of this association, even-though, the notas may not have something like a carana still the affix ‘nya’ would be applied to them to indicate, their dharma and āmāya (a group formed on account of their common tradition of learning and practice). So nātya will mean the dharma and āmāya of notas.

We see here, that in the opinion of the later commentators, notas had no carana of their own but had their own

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27 Ibid., p.247.

28 Dr. Agrawal is positive in his opinion, "That Pāṇini looked upon the dramaturgical works as āmaṇya of sacred authority, associated with the caranas, is borne out by the reference to Nātya in Sūtra, Pa., Iv-3-129 (of nata śabdāpi dharmaṃ āmaṇāyor eva bhavati - Kāśiśa)", Agrawal, Op.Cit., p.315.
but had their own dharma and āṃśya, and by the fact of similar usage they are entitled to affix 'nya', because they had their nataśāṃpradāya and nata-dharma.

Here, one may ask, whether Pāṇini himself had only this consideration of similar usage or whether he knew that there was a sort of carma (vedic-school) of nata also.

We have seen that he mentions two authors of Nataśāṃtras, bīkā and kṛṣṇāya, whose students were called saṅgī line and kṛṣṇāyins. We have in the Nīghantus about eight names or synonyms of Rtvijas - sacrificial priests. The list of synonyms is headed by Bharatā. Bharatā are well-known in Ṛgveda as a tribe. The members of this tribe might have had the privilege of being sacrificial priests or some of them had this privilege. The extant N3, attributed to Bharata Muni, also mentions Bharatā in plural, suggesting that there was a class of professionals of Nāṭya. It is well-known that in the sacrificial rituals, there was place for singing, instrumental playing, dancing, gesturing, etc. It is not unlikely that these Bharata Rtvijas - the sacrificial priests might have been performing these artistic functions as a part of sacred rituals.

We know from the N3, that it had its relation to the four vedas, and it took pūṭha (recitation of prose and

29 N3, I.1, 17.
verse) from theṚgveda, gītā (song) from Śāmveda, Abhinaya (gesticulation) from Yaj. and rasa from Ṛv.30 We also gather from the first Adhyāya of the NS that it is called Nātyaveda.

In later literature, we also find the echoes this belief. While speaking about the greatness of Nātya, Kalidas says that the sages say 'āmaunati' which literally means 'recite the tradition'. Here the verb 'āmaunati' has the same root and prefix as the word āmāya has, i.e. ātmānā.

In his play, 'Nālevikāgnimitra',31 Kalidas describes Nātya as 'Kāntakṛtu', a charming sacrifice for the Gods. The word kṛtu means a vedic sacrifice a Yajna, and it is regarded as charming, because of its dramatic elements of song, dance, gestures and rasa.32

From all this discussion, it is very likely that when Pāṇini associated the word Nātya with Chāndogya etc. and the Nātaśūtras of Bālāsi and Kṛṣṇāya with pārāśara and karmananda respectively he must have the dhāraṇa and āmaunā of nātas before him and therefore, he associated Nātya and the Nātaśūtras with such sacred saṁpradāyas as chāndogas and

30 Of rasa in Av. p.134 of this study.


32 For an interesting comparison of Nātya with Yajna (sacrifice), see H. Christopher Byrski, Conduct of Ancient Indian Theatre (New Delhi: M.H. Publisher, 1974).
Bhikṣu sūtras. So the hypothesis that Pañinī knew of the sacred vedic character of Mātya, and that there was a carana of Bharata is not without some foundation, though we have no other means to ascertain. But if our guess that Bharata- Rivijas had something to do with what later on became dramatic art is not baseless we may imagine that there was even a carana of Bharata. In that case, the Pañinian Sūtra 129, associating the nātas with chandogas, yajñikas etc., was justified.

Even if this hypothesis is not found acceptable, one thing is certain that for Pañinī, there were two Natasūtras by two independent authors and that there was Mātya, meaning a sort of organisation having its duties and the tradition of learning and practice. This means that as old as Pañinī, if not earlier, there were two schools of Natasūtras. It shows that Mātya was a well recognized tradition practised by the nātas, before or at the time of Pañinī.

Here, we may also note, another reference from Pañinī, which shows that he was familiar with some aspects of dramaturgy. Pañinī in the sūtra 3-2-21 gives the list of words to which 'kara' can be applied. Here with other words, he mentions nāndi also. This is to explain the use of the word nāndikara. It is known that nāndi is a sort of prayer to Gods. Its purpose is to please God and men. From the N3,
we know that Nandi is a part of the purvarupa. So it is likely that it might be a part of the dhamma of naatas and might have been mentioned in the Natasutras. This reference also points to the possibility of a Nāṭya-prayoga (performance of a drama) in Pāṇini's time.

Considering the use of the term rasa in the aesthetic sense in the sutra 'rasādibhyaśca', and a recognition of existence of traditional teaching and practice of dramaturgy in Pāṇini, is it not possible to imagine the existence of Rasasutra in one of these Natasutras and traditional learning?

References of Nāṭya in Patañjali

Here we may also note some references of Nāṭya and its aspects in the 'Mahābhāṣya' of Patañjali. There is a reference, which so to say describes pieces of dramatic action. In the 'Bhasya', on Pāṇini's sutra III: 1-26, there is a long discussion about what is technically called nica-causalas, embodying fifteen vārttikas. Justifying the use of the present tense for the events, which happened at different places or at different times, Patañjali illustrates the use of the present tense for the events which happened long before in the past thus:
From this passage, we can legitimately infer, that it refers to the pieces of action of two plays which one may name as 'kañçavadan' (killing of kañca) and Balideväda (tying of Bali). In the 'Pradīpa' the commentary on the 'Mahābhāṣya', the reading is sobhikāḥ in place of 'sobhanikāḥ', and the sobhika is explained as natānāḥ vyākhyānopākhyāyāḥ—lecturers of natas by the commentator Kalyāṇa. It is possible also that an actor, dressed up according to the character and ready to go on the stage was also called sobhanika.


In the Bhūṣya on Vārttika No. 5 on the sūtra 6.1.25, to illustrate how consonants take vowels, the Mahābhāṣyakāra says: "The wives of the nataś (actors), who are on the stage, were asked, whose are you? whose are you? and they answered - yours, yours." This is a clear reference to nataś and their wives, and the sage.

On Pāṇini's sūtra 'ākhya to upayoge' I.4.29, Patanjali makes another reference to nataś. Explaining the use of 'upayoge' he says:

'ṇaṭasya śrṇoti, granthikasya śrṇoti.
Upayoge ityacyamāne pyatra prāṇmiti.
eṣopi hyupayogah itaśeṣopayoge
yadāniḥbhakā ruṣmaḥ gacchanti.
naṭaya śroṣyāno granthikasya
śroṣyāsa iti.37

The above sūtra, is one of the several instances on the Ablative case given by Pāṇini. It means the Ablative case is to be used where Upayoge - that is regular hearing and learning - is given from a teacher (ākhya). Explaining this Patanjali says that in other cases, where no regular listening (or teaching) is involved, one can use the possessive

37 Ibid., I, p.329.
case and as example he gives, "we listen to a nāṭa (actor), we listen to a grāntha (narrator), etc." This is a clear reference about an actor, who is speaking. So a nāṭa here will never be a puppet.

Now who are the āraṇbhakas? The uḍḍyotakāra explains āraṇbhakas as the principle persons among the audience who initiate the drama. Dr. Agnihotri follows this interpretation when he says, "Bhāṣyakāra has used the Āraṇbhaka for those who initiated the staging of the drama and whose arrival made the acting or recital begin." Thus Patañjali mentions another personage in theatrical performance, one who teaches actors or one who initiates a performance.

On the Fifth Vārttika, on the sūtra II.1.69, 'varṇovarnana', Patañjali mentions 'sarvakeśi nataḥ'.

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Dr. Agrawal (Op.Cit., p.292) takes ākhyatā in the sūtra as nata teachers or teachers of actors, who initiate; and takes to mean initiating novices. This interpretation does not seem correct. He seems to have taken the compound nātopañjhayayayoh of Pradīpa' to mean the ākhyatā or teachers of nātas. But the dual number means nāta and ākhyatā. The questioner says here, listening is common to both but can upayog be used for those who listen to a nāṭa? The Sūtra denies it.

It means an actor with long hair, big beard and mustache.

Patanjali also mentions the singing of a nāṭa 'agāśinsnatah41 while explaining the sutra Fa.II.4.77. It means the actor sang. This shows that the actors were supposed to sing and so they must have studied and learnt music.42

On the sutra, 'Silpani svun43 III.1.145, Patanjali says that the termination 'svun' should be applied to nrṣa, khan, and ranj. Svun is a kṛt affix 'ak' added to a root in the sense of a skilled artisan. The 'Kāśika'44 illustrates this with nartakah, nartaki, etc. It means a person who dances and a female actress who dances.

On the sutra III.1.146, 'gastahakā' there is no Bāṣya. The 'Kāśika'45 while illustrating this, mentions

41 Ibid., I, p.495.
42 The theory that these references refer only to the Pantomimic killing and binding (A.E. Kaeth, The Sanskrit Drama, Oxford University Press, 1954, p.33) and that there is no need to regard them as human beings is invalidated here. No one has ever heard marionettes singing or speaking.
gayaka, gayika (male and female reciters). On the next sutra, III.1.147, 'gyuta ca', there is no Bhāṣya. 'Gyuta' is also the krt affix 'an' in the sense of skilled agent. The 'kārika' illustrates this with the words gayana and gayami (male and female singers).

While discussing the sutra IV.1.3 Patañjali mentions the word Barukhāsa. It means, according to Pradīpa, a male actor, acting a female part.

While explaining the vārttika 2 on the sutra IV.1.114, Patañjali mentions the examples nāṭi and nāṭera (female actress).

These references show Patañjali's familiarity with the theatrical world of his times, and so his illustration

46 Ibid., p.122.
'rasiko natah' on the sutra, 'rasadhayah ca' would be quite in natural course. Emphasizing again the point that Pāṇinī's sutras are to be understood in the light of the exegetic tradition of the 'Mahābhāṣya' and later commentators, we can, without hesitation, say that to Pāṇinī also, the institution of theatre was known, and that he must have used the word rasa in its aesthetic significance. Thus the concept of Rasa in its aesthetic connotation was well-known and associated with Nātya, just in the age when Aristotle promulgated his theory of Catharsis in relation to ancient Greek tragedy.