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## PAMPA AND CIVILIZATIONAL LITERATURE: KANNADA'S RASHTRAKUTA ROOTS IN 2026 GLOBAL DISCOURSE

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### ABSTRACT

Adikavi Pampa (c. 902–955 CE), the foundational poet of Kannada literature, exemplifies civilizational literature through his epics *Ādipurāṇa* and *Vikramārjuna Vijaya* (Pampa Bharata), composed under Rashtrakuta patronage. This comprehensive literature review synthesizes historical, thematic, linguistic, and contemporary scholarship, tracing Pampa's role from 10th-century Deccan courts to 2026's global discourses on decolonial canons, digital humanities, and multilingual world literature. Spanning Rashtrakuta bilingualism, Jain philosophical infusions, and modern reinterpretations, it identifies gaps in eco-criticism, gender studies, and AI poetics while projecting Pampa's relevance amid post-Booker Kannada resurgence.

**KEYWORDS:** Adikavi Pampa, Rashtrakuta literature, civilizational discourse, Kannada Champu, Jain epics.

### INTRODUCTION

Kannada literature's medieval efflorescence under the Rashtrakutas (753–973 CE) marks a pivotal chapter in India's civilizational narrative, where regional vernaculars challenged Sanskrit hegemony. Adikavi Pampa, born circa 902 CE into a Jain Bhavikireddy family possibly in Vengi (modern Andhra Pradesh) or Annigeri (Dharwad, Karnataka served as kavichakravartin (emperor among poets) to Vemulavada Chalukya king Arikesari II, a Rashtrakuta feudatory. His masterpieces, *Ādipurāṇa* (941 CE) and *Pampa Bharata* (c. 941–955 CE), pioneered the Champu style a sophisticated prose-verse hybrid that fused narrative grandeur with poetic lyricism.

Pampa's works transcend mere adaptation; they embody civilizational ethos dharma intertwined with martial valor, renunciation amid conquest, and desi linguistic innovation reflecting Deccan's multicultural fabric. In 2026, amid global shifts toward polycentric literatures (e.g., Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* clinching the International Booker), Pampa's Rashtrakuta roots fuel discourses on civilizational texts, as evidenced by conferences like the January 2026 "Two-Day International Conference on Civilizational Literature." This review systematically surveys primary sources, historical contexts, thematic analyses, scholarly interpretations, digital revivals, and future trajectories, underscoring Pampa's bridge from regional epic to world literature paradigm.

### **Historical Context: Rashtrakuta Dynasty and Literary Patronage**

The Rashtrakutas, rising from feudatories to Deccan overlords, supplanted the Chalukyas in 753 CE under Dantidurga, establishing Manyakheta (modern Malkhed, Karnataka) as their capital. Their empire, spanning Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra, and Tamil Nadu, fostered a bilingual courtly culture: Sanskrit for pan-Indian prestige, Kannada for regional assertion. Emperor Amoghavarsha I (r. 814–878 CE), a Jain convert, authored *Kavirajamarga* (c. 850 CE) Kannada's first poetics treatise praising Vachana dialects and Halegannada (old Kannada), thus canonizing vernacular aesthetics.

This patronage peaked with the "Ratnatraya" (three gems): Pampa, Ponna (*Shantipurana*), and Ranna (*Sahasa Bhima Vijaya*). Pampa, equating patron Arikesari II with Mahabharata's Arjuna, navigated political flattery and philosophical depth. Rashtrakuta inscriptions, like the 982 CE Navajeetike, affirm Kannada's administrative role alongside Sanskrit and Prakrit. Scholars like A.K. Ramanujan highlight this era's "desi turn," where folk idioms infiltrated Champu, democratizing epic forms. The dynasty's fall to the Chalukyas in 973 CE did not eclipse its legacy; instead, it seeded Hoysala and Kalyana Chalukya literatures. In civilizational terms, Rashtrakutas embodied syncretism—Jainism tempering Shaiva militarism—mirroring Pampa's ethical tapestries.

### **Political and Cultural Milieu**

Rashtrakuta kings, often dubbed "paragons of generosity," commissioned temples (e.g., Kailasa at Ellora) and texts, blending Bhakti fervor with Jain scholarship. Pampa's era coincided with Arikesari's campaigns against the Gangas and Cholas, infusing his epics with heroic realism. Courtly salons at Vemulavada nurtured kavya, where poets debated alankara

(ornamentation) and rasa (aesthetic mood). This milieu prefigured Navodaya modernism, positioning Kannada as a civilizational vector against northern Sanskrit centrism.

### **Pampa's Life and Biographical Debates**

Sparse epigraphs fuel hagiographic debates. *Pampa Bharata's* self-references suggest a 53-year lifespan, with initiation at Shravanabelagola under Gunavarma III. Vengi birth aligns with Chalukya ties; Annigeri with epigraphic mentions of Bappayya-Nagachauḍike (Pampa's parents). Legends portray Pampa as a warrior-poet, capturing a dove that morphed into Amba (goddess), symbolizing divine inspiration. His Jain orthodoxy—evident in ahimsa advocacy—coexisted with martial patronage, a tension unresolved in biographies like Hampa Nagarajaiah's *Pampa: Portrait of a Poet* (1981). Recent digitization (e.g., Internet Archive's *Pampa Bharata Dipike*) revives primary evidence, urging nuanced historiography beyond colonial-era hagiography.

### **Analysis of Major Works**

#### ***Ādipurāṇa*: The Primordial Chronicle**

Composed at 39, this 20-section Champu retells Jinasena's Sanskrit *Ādi Purāṇa*, chronicling Tirthankara Rishabhanatha's avatars. Central is the Bharata-Bahubali fratricide, resolved through renunciation—Bharata's imperial quest yields to Bahubali's moksha. Pampa innovates: vivid similes (upama) depict cosmic cycles, while prose elaborates katha-vaktra (narrative voice). Themes probe purusharthas dharma triumphs Artha resonating Rashtrakuta realpolitik. Eco-motifs, like Varada river's fecundity, prefigure modern readings.

#### ***Vikramārjuna Vijaya* (Pampa Bharata): Epic Reimagination**

Pampa's magnum opus adapts the Mahabharata, focalizing Arjuna (Vikramarjuna) as sole hero across 20 kandas. Krishna recedes; Karna and Duryodhana gain nobility via Jain karma ethics. Champu structure alternates gadya (prose for battles) and padya (verse for pathos), with 1,200+ slokas showcasing svara-laya (rhythm). Innovations include deshi vocabulary (e.g., "kempu" for red) and alankaras like anuprasa (alliteration). Patron Arikesari embodies Arjuna's valor, blurring biography and myth.

#### **Stylistic Innovations: Champu and Linguistic Synthesis**

Champu's hybridity Sanskrit tatsama with Kannada tadbhava forged Halegannada's lexicon, influencing Ponna and Ranna. Pampa's prosody (matsya, bhujanga meters) and rasa evocation (vira for heroism, karuna for tragedy) standardized Kannada kavya. Commentaries like

Bellave Venkatanaranappa's *Vijnaana Shaastra* (17th c.) dissect these, affirming Pampa's enduring grammar.

### **Thematic Dimensions in Civilizational Context**

Pampa's civilizational import lies in syncretizing Jain universalism with Deccan particularism. Dharma-artha tensions mirror Rashtrakuta expansions; ahimsa critiques conquest without pacifism. Gender portrayals Subhadra's agency, Draupadi's trials offer proto-feminist lenses. Eco-civilizational readings highlight nature as samsara metaphor, aligning with 2026 sustainability discourses. Globally, Pampa parallels Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* in vernacular empire-building.

### **Scholarly Interpretations: Evolution of Criticism**

#### **Early Commentaries and Colonial Scholarship**

Medieval glosses like *Pampa Bharata Dipike* by Dr. D.L. Narasimhachar (1930s) cataloged variants; 20th-century editions (e.g., Oriental Research Institute) standardized texts. Colonial historians like Rice (1909) framed Pampa as "South India's Homer," undervaluing Jain agency.

#### **Post-Independence Analyses**

K. Marulasiddappa (1970s) emphasized linguistic nationalism; Hampa Nagarajaiah (1980s) unpacked Banavasi symbolism. Feminist critics like C.N. Ramachandran revisit Draupadi; Dalit scholars trace Bahubali's subalternity. Structuralists analyze Champu's narratology per Genette.

#### **Contemporary Lenses (2000–2026)**

Postcolonial readings (e.g., Ramanujan, 1990) position Pampa against Brahmanical Mahabharata. Digital humanities enable stylometry; eco-critics probe *Ādipurāṇa*'s bioregionalism. 2026 sees Pampa in "civilizational literature" via conferences, countering Eurocentrism.

#### **Pampa in Digital Humanities and Global Accessibility**

Internet Archive hosts critical editions; AI-OCR deciphers Champu scripts. Projects like EAP673 preserve early Kannada prints, democratizing access. Post-2025 Booker, translations (e.g., *Heart Lamp*) amplify Pampa's visibility, paralleling Vachana globalizations.

## Global Discourse in 2026: Relevance and Resonances

2026's polycentric turn—fueled by BRICS literatures, decolonial curricula recasts Pampa. The Jan 2026 conference frames Rashtrakuta Kannada as "civilizational" akin to Sumerian epics. Parallels with Tamil *Silappatikaram* or Persian *Shahnameh* underscore non-Aryan vectors. Amid AI literature debates, Pampa's rasa challenges generative models. Underexplored Kannada remains a critique, per recent forums.

## Comparative Civilizational Studies

Pampa vs. Valmiki: Vernacular heroism subverts Sanskrit orality. Global south alignments position *Pampa Bharata* against Homeric *Iliad* in world lit syllabi.

## Research Gaps and Methodological Critiques

Biographical voids persist; comparative eco-Jainism lags. Gender/Dalit readings need archival depth. Systematic learning, as Mandya University urges (2026), demands interdisciplinary tools. AI poetics simulations remain nascent for Champu metrics.

## Future Directions

2026 trajectories: VR Rashtrakuta courts; blockchain for manuscript provenance; translation metrics post-Booker. Interweave Pampa with IoT-era dystopias or SDG heritage. Empirical stylometry via Python/NLTK could quantify deshi innovations.

## CONCLUSION

Pampa's Rashtrakuta-rooted civilizational literature endures as Kannada's civilizing force from Deccan Champus to 2026's global symphony. Bridging epochs, his epics demand renewed, tech-infused scholarship to illuminate polyphonic humanity.

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