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# Urban Hellscape: Milton's Pandemonium and the Political Theology of the East India Company

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## Abstract

John Milton's Pandemonium, the infernal capital built by Satan and his followers, presents a potent allegory for the East India Company's (EIC)<sup>1</sup> exploitative urbanization and economic dominance in 17th- and 18th-century South Asia. Its grandiose, and yet morally bankrupt architecture mirrors the EIC's transformation of Indian cities like Calcutta and Madras into hubs of imperial extraction, where wealth was accumulated through coerced labour, taxation, urban racialism and militarized trade. This paper demonstrates that both Pandemonium and the EIC's colonial urban centres functioned as sites of oppressive governance, where dazzling facades concealed systemic violence and moral decay. Furthermore, the paper highlights how Milton's critique of Satan's tyrannical ambition prefigures the eventual collapse of the EIC, underscoring literature's capacity to interrogate imperial capitalism. This analysis employs Roy's Colonial Urbanism, combined with Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, to investigate the conundrums. The study calls for further interdisciplinary explorations of early modern literature as a mirror to contemporary capitalist exploitation.

**Keywords:** Pandemonium, East India Company, Colonial Urbanism, Colonial Capitalism, Exploitation

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## 1. Introduction

In *Paradise Lost*, Mammon urges the fallen angels to mine the depths of Hell for gold, revealing an early literary critique of greed and material ambition (I.687). This image anticipates the extractive logic that define institutions like the East India Company. Milton's *Paradise Lost* is not only a cornerstone of the Western literary canon but also a critical exploration of ambition, power, and defiance. Milton's epic portrays the depiction of Pandemonium, the infernal capital erected in Hell, which is home to Satan and his fallen angels. As the site where they convene to strategize their rebellion, Pandemonium is a physical manifestation of corruption, chaos, and moral decay. It stands as a symbol of pride, vanity, and defiance, reflecting the spiritual downfall of its creators. However, beyond its theological significance, Milton's portrayal of Pandemonium can be interpreted

as a broader social and political commentary on the materialistic forces shaping early modern Europe. Fallon (1984) points out that Milton is perceived as the most aware figure about England's colonial role in the world of seventeenth-century geopolitics than most of his contemporaries because of his experience as a member of Oliver Cromwell's government. Although he never openly mentions the EIC, his life (1608-1674) parallels the Company's rise from a merchant corporation to a territorial power. His great concern about concentrated wealth and tyranny is illustrated in his republican writings.

This paper compares Milton's *Pandemonium* with the East India Company's economic systems as parallel manifestations of corrupt ambition. *Pandemonium*'s magnificent yet morally bankrupt architecture mirrors colonial cities built on exploited labour and resources. Like Satan's gilded palace concealing hellish origins, London's prosperity masked its dependence on colonial extraction. The Company's global trade networks reshaped economic orders through the same morally dubious means as *Pandemonium*'s construction. Milton's depiction of demon-built splendour directly reflects early modern capitalism's glittering but oppressive financial instruments. Both systems relied on deceptive appearances: *Pandemonium*'s jewels camouflaged damnation, just as Company profits veiled exploitation. Investments and loans became the Company's architectural tools, constructing an empire through financial rather than physical materials. This comparison reveals how European modernity's economic foundations, like *Pandemonium*'s halls, were built on hidden suffering. Like Satan's court celebrating hollow victories, the Company prospered through subjugation. Both reveal how imperial wealth relied on moral compromise. *Pandemonium* thus becomes an allegory for capitalism's original sins: urbanization built on oppression. Loewenstein, et al., (1999) argue that the Indian conversion was often merely employed as a pretext for territorial adventures and commercial exploitation.

The end of the 15th century saw great tides in the economic history of Europe. The more recent studies on this topic showcase that the treatment of the rise of the modern world economy in the 16th and 17th centuries was restricted mostly to the colonial territories (Pach, 1968). In that time, everyone showed willingness about the goals of colonization and largely agreed about the means of colonizing. It is said that early modern colonization was necessarily apolitical. Modern national economies were therefore "necessarily characterized by a selfish national commercial policy of a harsh and rude kind" (Pincus, 2012, p.4). England sought to accumulate wealth through a favourable balance of trade, exporting finished goods (wool, cloth) and importing raw materials (spices, tobacco, sugar). Andrews (1936) concludes that "the colonies, in constantly accelerating measure, became a necessary asset in mercantilist eyes." The 17th and 18th centuries saw European cities like London, Amsterdam, and Paris expand into imperial hubs, fueled by colonial wealth and trade monopolies. Yet this urbanization was built on exploitation, enslavement, resource extraction, and systemic inequality as profit-driven capitalism prioritized empire over ethics. The EIC competed with Dutch and Portuguese for control of Indian Ocean trade, establishing factories in Surat (1613) and Madras (1639). It epitomized shift, wielding financial tools (joint-stock ventures, militarized trade) to extract Asian resources, enriching metropolises while entrenching global hierarchies.

New Historicism, examines literature as deeply embedded in the power structures, social practices, and cultural tensions of its historical moment, thus rejecting formalist and ahistorical readings. Greenblatt (2012) argues that Renaissance texts do not merely reflect their era but actively participate in the negotiation of power, identity, and authority. The core idea that "There is no escape from contingency" (p.4) captures New Historicism's core premise: literary works are enmeshed in the material conditions of their production, shaped by institutions like the church, monarchy, and colonial enterprise. Central to Greenblatt's analysis is the concept of self-fashioning, the process by which individuals construct identities within and against the societal constraints. The study placed value on the literary form of drama and cautiously traced the voices of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the deprived (Lekha & Dhakal, 2021). This approach is crucial to observe different perspectives in historiography, thus featuring the everyday endeavours and contributions of the suppressed classes, the weak minorities, or the hidden active social groups in history. Thus, it aims to bring significant change and comprehension by evaluating the historical background from the eyes of different social units (Özlem & Sayar, 2024).

Colonial Urbanism redefines how we understand the spatial and socio-economic hierarchies of postcolonial cities. Roy (2011), argues that urban informality often manifested in slums, irregular settlements, and precarious housing is not an accidental byproduct of rapid urbanization but a direct legacy of colonial governance that persists in modern city planning. She critiques the notion that slums are "marginal" spaces, instead positioning them as central to the functioning of capitalist urbanism, which systematically excludes the poor while privileging elite enclaves. In her words, "Informality is not the exception but the rule, a state-sanctioned logic of urban development that perpetuates segregation" (Roy, 2011, p.45). This framing exposes how colonial-era racial zoning (e.g., British Calcutta's "White Town" vs. "Black Town") has evolved into contemporary class-based segregation, where gated communities and corporate hubs displace informal settlements under the guise of "world-class city" initiatives. Roy's analysis highlights how colonial land acquisition and revenue systems, such as those imposed by the East India Company, established extractive urban governance that continues to shape postcolonial cities. She notes, "The colonial state's obsession with mapping, taxing, and policing urban space created a template for modern dispossession" (p.78). This resonates with colonial urbanism's reliance on divide-and-rule tactics, where segregated housing, unequal infrastructure, and militarized policing sustain urban hierarchies.

## **2. Hell's Urban Logic: Pandemonium and the East India Company's Geography of Exclusion**

Scholars like Blake (1793) and Abrams (1953) have posited that Milton's depiction of the fallen capital mirrors the urban centres of the early modern period, which were rapidly evolving during the seventeenth century. As Europe's cities swelled

with wealth and industry, they also became sites of moral and political upheaval. Blake (1789) narrates the exploitative nature of the eighteenth century London, a city built on the expense of capitalist urban notions, and the social degradation embedded in the era:

“How the Chimney-sweepers cry  
Every blackning Church appalls, (Blake, 1789, p.7).

Cox and Halpern (1993) quote Blake who linked Pandemonium to the industrialised cities of his time, viewing it as a metaphor for the corruption caused by urban growth and the concentration of wealth. Blake (1808/1988) in another occasion writes that:

“And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?” (Blake, 1808-1988, p.95).

The “dark Satanic Mills” are the representation of large factories, urban centres and exploitative institutions of the early industrial age which Blake deemed as dehumanizing and corrupting. These notions also contrasted with the holy city of Jerusalem which symbolize moral uprightness. Milton's own experience with the growth of London and other English cities could have informed his portrayal of Pandemonium. According to Poole (2013), Milton's writing often reflects the anxieties of a rapidly changing world, one where the medieval order was being replaced by the new capitalist and imperial structures that were taking hold in Europe. In this context, Pandemonium stands as a warning against unchecked ambition and the moral degradation that results from the pursuit of power and wealth. This closely aligns with the economic and militarized practices of the East India Company during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Hand (2005) argues that Milton's text projects his doubt and consternation to illustrate the excesses of consumption and accumulation of his contemporaries. In *Paradise Lost*, Satan is indeed a capitalist figure.

Theis (2005) argues that Pandemonium represents a fallen architecture that signifies material complexity and broad spaces. It attempts to generate a rigid and consistent architecture that is despotically and diametrically in opposition to its surrounding physical environment. In *Paradise Lost*, it is Satan who is compared to “one who longs in populous city pent / Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air” (IX.445-49). These quotations are a clear indication of Satan's urbanistic tendencies, in which Pandemonium is populated by a large number of fallen angels. Pandemonium is urbanised again as:

“At Pandemonium, they anon  
With hundreds and with thousands trooping came  
Attended: all access was thronged, the gates  
And porches wide, but chief the spacious hall...  
Thick swarmed, both on the ground and in the air,  
Brushed with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees...” (1.752-68)

Lyle (2000) calls the construction of Pandemonium a “parody of architectural history.” The immense number of fallen angels stationed in the pandemonium indicates the wasteness of the satanic city and their colossal, malignant ambitions. Its corrupt order clearly mirrors the EIC's urban planning, in which racial divide was a key priority. This resonates with the idea of urbanization that denies its occurrence through evolution. The theme is generally cultivated that edifice more functionally, more accurate, and thus, more tempting for its caged inhabitants. This way, a city conceals the systematic connection among institutions through wiring. We become incompetent to see them serviceable institutions. As already indicated, the racial differences led to the land-based discrimination. The extractive institutions of the EIC prioritized the white settlers over the natives who were ultimately pushed to dirty slums. The service was done just to the colonizers, not to the colonized. This way, the city also conceals the State. Black (2024) in “Languering Black Rage” writes about black money laundering in the Global South and states that in various ways, the city provides services and opportunities in the form of bribes to launder. A city washes away the misconduct of corrupt politicians, bungling bureaucrats, dupable managers, and wealth-hungry workers. The city portrays spoliation of conquests through cursed wealth. Thus, urbanization has been a key source for the expansion of trade and other interests for the colonial companies (Reddy, 2021). This trade-urbanization played a crucial role in growing the Anglo-Indian cities of Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay. The EIC not merely conducted trade and commerce in these urban centres but also gained a new shape as a ruling entity in India during the 18th century. Here, the argument is that the English EIC's economic power paved the way for urbanization. It was this urban economics that lent it enormous dividends. Soon (2022) emphasises the stock of fixed capital as an essential element of urban infrastructure during the 18th century. Reddy (2021) thinks that the overflow of migrants to the urban centres resulted in the nasty pollution and numerous health diseases. Generally, scientists find various factors of ecological degradation, such as barbaric deforestation, unchecked mining, and the ever-expanding infrastructural activities. It is generally concluded that most of these evils started with European colonization. That time, individuals, including the EIC, were daily encroaching upon the lands in the city under various pretences.

The EIC was initially chartered by the British Crown to trade for spices and cotton in Mughal India. The Company illustrated colonial fronts as suited for building the empire, as with every conquest, the Company set up sites to loot the resources. Black (2024) asserts that the pursuit to rob native populations and minerals urged the Company and the Crown to travel to these faraway regions. To make it practical, both had a partnership to establish militarized garrisons and cities to extract wealth and capital. All this was erected at the expense of native suffering and death. The EIC constructed the Bombay fort building just to secure spaces of commerce from violation by Sidis, Marathas, and other Europeans, such as the Portuguese or French (Chhabria, 2019, p.37).

There are also accounts of migrants being housed in the choultry or in “temporary Pandals<sup>2</sup> erected outside” and adjoining sheds by the EIC. Bhabha (2013) extends this notion and states the migrant flow is a direct result of the processes of colonialism, capitalism and imperialism, which dispossess the locals not merely of lands but also identity, a sense of it. In order to secure commerce, individuals and trade unions needed to establish value. Just to allure more dwellers, state regulations were slackened, and special benefits were provided to open up the town. In contrast, the “slum” narrative presented a different picture, maintaining the exclusions that were constitutive of the city. It made unnoticeable rural colonization and migration on which the city depended. Roy (2005, p.148) explains the urban segregation in her theoretical approach that “In postcolonial cities, informality is not an exception but a systemic mode of urban governance. The ‘slum’ is not a marginal space but a product of state-sanctioned segregation, where the poor are criminalised while elites enjoy privatised urbanism.” According to Black (2024, p.132), it is this colonial process of conquest, the dialectic between wealth and death, that soon, more cities being built, more White settlers arriving, and more industries flourishing.

Furthermore, the poet’s description of the “palace of great Lucifer” in “the limits of the north” (V.755-62): “High on a hill, far blazing, as a mount / Raised on a mount, with pyramids and towers / From diamond quarries hewn” (V.757-59) aligns with the EIC’s materialistic grandeurs in the urban centres. Roy (2011, p.317) asserts that “The ‘world-class city’ agenda in postcolonial metropolises like Delhi or Jakarta actively demolishes informal settlements to make way for corporate hubs, enforcing a new geography of exclusion.” In the same way, as Reddy (2021, p.326) says that Madras, a seaport city in the Indian south, presented a typical case in this sense “Its sociolect-economic-cultural life had been grandly imperial and elite. Its language, dress, etiquette, recreation, and caste structure had outdistanced the other Indian colonial towns. Its architecture was grand, pompous, segregated, and spectacular” (Reddy, 2021, p.326). This way, Madras projected a modern picture of the colonial urbanism. Its grandure receded all the native notions of settlements. The purpose was to expand extrative institutions and add more revenue to the company’s coffers. The importance of Madras for such extra attention also laid in its geographical position as being a crucial port city for colonial trade.

### 3. Tyrannical Topographies: Satanic Cities and Colonial Spatial Apartheid

Pandemonium in *Paradise Lost* is not merely a symbol of disarray but also one of authoritarian control. Milton describes it as a “stately palace” (I,713) adorned with “glittering spires” (I, 732-33), yet it is built on the foundation of “devilish pride” and “envy” (I, 35-37). This image of a grand but morally bankrupt capital resonates with how European colonial powers, particularly the East India Company, used their control over global trade to amass immense wealth through the exploitation of indigenous peoples and natural resources. In examining Milton’s work, scholars like Fish (1985) have noted that Pandemonium represents a model of governance built on exploitation and deceit. Satan propagates to liberate the fallen angels from God’s rage, but conversely inflicts a worse tyranny, longing for absolute loyalty: “Better to rein in Hell than serve in Heaven” (I.263). Satan also defies and reframes his defeat as an autonomy. This reading aligns with the historical reality of colonial exploitation in the East Indies. Marshall (2005) outlines how the East India Company not only extracted wealth from the colonies but also contributed to the growth of capitalist structures in metropolitan cities like London, where profits from the colonies fueled the growth of urban centres and their financial institutions.

Dryden (1990) observes that Milton’s use of vivid architectural imagery in describing Pandemonium suggests a critique of the material excesses of his time. Pandemonium’s architectural opulence serves as a metaphor for the East India Company’s material power, which similarly masked moral corruption beneath imperial grandeur. The demons mine hellfire to build it, mirroring forced labour. Satan tells us “The work of slaves, disgrace of manhood” (VI.521). Wall (2015) states that Pandemonium focuses on size and distance. Critics have noticed Milton’s characterization of Mammon as attached to the earth. Mammon mines, destroys, and builds because he is unable to see God’s omnipotence. Mammon deems the earth ripe for both mining and usurpation, as is the case with the EIC. Furthermore, Kühnová (2008, p.10) identifies Pandemonium as a weak connection of dwelling that Satan showcases. In her study, the construction of Pandemonium displays Satan’s longing for “exploiting land and places as a means of power.” It is a parody of The Lord’s Prayer, “a material and spiritual landscape of false hope.” Quint et al., (2009) regard Satan as an “adventurer” anticipating, like the investors in the Virginia Company, to reap a huge profit from the labours of his surrogates in the terrestrial paradise. This is a kind of labour-oriented strategy that EIC employed while clearing the way for its exploitative purposes in the colonial regions, especially in the Sub-Continent. Nash (1974) states that the system of labour introduced by the EIC was vulnerable to all kinds of abuse. Once labour became a commodity that could be bought and sold for a profit, the temptation to exploit the system became almost irresistible. The forced labour can also be referred to as the strict taxation policies that the EIC had imposed in Bengal, thus resulting in the famine of 1770. Davis (2001, p.35) states that “The disaster befell a peasantry already ground down by exorbitant taxation and extortionate debt.”

Roy (2011, p.224) expands this narrative and states that “Colonial urbanism divided cities into ‘white towns’ and ‘black towns’, a racialised spatial order that persists today in the form of elite enclaves and ‘illegal’ slums. The postcolonial city inherits and recalibrates these segregations. “Satan’s palace is an elite enclave in Hell, separating rebel angels from damned souls. As quoted in *Paradise Lost*, “The capital seat of Lucifer,/ Pandemonium, the high capital/ Of Satan and his peers” (I.710-13). Therefore, “The high capital” serves as an elite space for Satan where he and his crew take their seat on the imperial throne and thus distance themselves from the “dark and dreary vale” (II.618) isolation of Hell. This exemplifies Calcutta’s “White Town” (British quarters being opulent and fortified) and “Black Town” (Slums and plantation zones of natives with expendable

labour) that were totally in contrast to each other. Such divisions aren't natural but state-engineered to sustain control with "Spatial Apartheid" where power was deliberately segregated. The EIC, like Satan, used spatial order to materialise power while rendering exploitation invisible. Roy (2011) states that "Colonial urbanism is the architecture of estrangement" (Roy, 2011, p. 89).

Apart from this, perhaps the most significant element of all this was the support that the EIC enjoyed from the British Parliament. In this regard, the wealth of Bengal swiftly went into Britain's coffers, while its city's own merchants and artisans were coerced 'like so many slaves' by their new masters. Ludden (1999) refers to the EIC as 'almost bankrupt Company' having been occupied in wreaking 'the most unparalleled Barbarities, Extortions and Monopolies' in Bengal, had now "cast their Eyes on America, as a new Theatre, whereon to exercise their Talents of Rapine, Oppression and Cruelty." Built through "dark materials" (II.916), Hell's resources twisted into gilded ruin. The EIC used "financial innovations", for example, bonds and tax farming, to convert plunder into London's wealth and splendour. Digby (1901, p.10) asserts that "India is not lightly taxed. In proportion to its income, it is so heavily taxed that a like weight of taxation in this country would procure no mercy and short shrift for the administrators who were responsible for its imposition." Digby (1901, p.21) again states that "The famine of 1770 was not a natural calamity; it was a man-made disaster...The Company's revenue policies drained Bengal of its grain reserves while taxes were collected at gunpoint." At one another occasion, Sen (1982, 39) argues that "The 1770 famine was not caused by food shortage but by the EIC's refusal to adjust taxes or release grain stocks. Entitlement failure, not crop failure, was the killer." In the same way, demons in Hell revelled in their 'magnificence' (II, 520-30) which Satan had projected, while ignoring their damnation. The shareholders of the EIC profited immensely while ignoring reports of famines, which killed almost 10 million people. Satan exploits this populous city and its inhabitants to gain his benefits:

"trusted to have seiz'd and into fraud  
Drew many, whom their place knows here no more:  
...yet populous, retains  
Number sufficient to possess her realms" (V. 400-410)

Just as Satan betrays many of his followers and the fallen angles in guise of rendering joyful life-style and eternal success which prompts them to rush in and be caught in his cage in large numbers for which the realm is spacious to accommodate. In the way, the words "seiz'd" and "fraud" are the basic representations attached to the dealings of EIC frequently. Dishonest masters maltreated their servants as in the case of EIC as well; unscrupulous agents, "spirits" as they were known, having lured innocent young country dwellers into servitude with false promises (or in some cases kidnapping them), sold them off to merchants and sea captains as cargo. The devils, in this case, the (EIC) were acquiring feudal authority over territory they had yet to see, "a Fabrick wonderful Of absolute perfection" (X, 482-83). Land grabbing became the chief policy of the EIC as more and more economic and regulatory zones were in demand in order to smoothly run the company's exploitative strategies and actions. Both the EIC and Satan use architectural splendour and economic beneficence to disguise systemic violence.

#### 4. Trade Winds of Damnation: Mercantile Expansion as Theological Crisis in *Paradise Lost* and Company Rule

The East India Company's role in the early modern global economy has been the subject of extensive historical research. Scholars like Chaudhuri (1990) and Marshall (2005) have discussed the Company's influence in shaping global trade networks, focusing on its monopolistic control over the flow of goods from the East Indies to Europe. The Company not only facilitated the exchange of goods, such as spices, silk, and opium, but also played a pivotal role in financing colonial ventures through complex credit and capital systems. Steele (2001) has argued that the EIC exemplified the emerging capitalist ethos of the period, marked by speculative investments, colonial exploitation, and the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. Therefore, Milton's devil represents the crossing of Chaos with a topical resonance related to ocean exploration in the seek for settling overseas plantations, establishing commercial contacts with the East, or creating diplomatic and political ties with overseas governments. Lim (2009) emphasises that in the tradition of epic, travel over water is a controlling and resonating metaphor.

Lim (2009) finds that Milton's hints of China and India indicate complex cultural significations that are associated with the hope of commercial possibilities and anxieties about the Europeans' early modern expansionist ambitions in Asia. The Company's use of "trade capital" and financial resources invested in the expansion of colonial ventures mirrors Milton's depiction of a system that, while outwardly magnificent and profitable, is morally corrupt and ultimately doomed. This interpretation of Pandemonium as a symbol of colonial exploitation highlights the ways in which urbanization, fueled by capitalist ambition, often leads to social and economic injustices that disproportionately affect the marginalised. Satan's abode, as built with "ribbed gold" (I.542) and mined by the labour of his demonic crew, aligns greatly with the EIC's exploitation of Indian farmers. The Company invested in Bengal through cash-crop cultivation while limiting the grain supply to the natives. This mirrors Pandemonium's "gilded ruin" (I.713).

Furthermore, Travers (2010) argues that the economic exploitation practised by the EIC is reflected in the way Pandemonium functions as a hub of commercial activity in Milton's epic. Just as Pandemonium serves as the centre of hellish governance, the EIC served as the economic engine driving the exploitation of colonies. Both systems are predicated on the accumulation of wealth through the subjugation and manipulation of others. This narrative is more emphasised in Said's (2016) work "Orientalism" as he states that "Taking the late eighteenth century as a very roughly defined starting point. Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient,...settling it, ruling over it: In short,

Orientalism as a Western style is for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.” Lim (2009) argues that at first look, China and India may strike the reader as incidental geopolitical sites captured in *Paradise Lost* only in passing as the epic poet unfolds the satanic journeying from hell to earth.

King Charles I had been keen to extend English influence abroad as the sovereign who “wanted a trade that was more obviously imperial... with fortified settlements” in Asia (Mishra, 2018, p.30). Said (2016) relates to the Orient as an essential part of Europe’s materialistic culture. Orientalism specifically delineates and illustrates cultural and even ideological parts as a mode of discourse with aiding institutions, speech, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, and even colonialist bureaucracies and styles. Wynne (2008) in Catherine of Braganza (1638–1705) showcases that *Paradise Lost* exemplifies the spice trade as the devil’s labour. In the opinion of the writer, Milton propagates a kind of opposition toward Eurasian exchange that had been festering within England for decades.

In *Votes of Parliament Concerning the East India Trade Merchants*, the signatories pressured Cromwell to either authorize the EIC to reestablish the company’s monopoly via a new charter or to amend the trade obstacles, thus allowing individuals to have trade voyages to Asia (Zwierlein, 2015). “Introduction” to the British rule in India was consolidated in 1765, when the Mughal Emperor granted the right of revenue collection to the East India Company, initiating its “transformation from commercial company to territorial ruler” (Major, 2017). The operations of the East India Company were heavily reliant on financial mechanisms, such as stock markets, bills of exchange, and the use of capital to fund distant trade expeditions. These financial practices enabled the Company to maintain its dominance in trade, despite frequent political and military conflicts. In this regard, the Company’s use of trade capital can be seen as a manifestation of the larger processes of urbanization and economic centralisation that were transforming Europe during the period. Hand (2005) believes that Milton’s work is the mouthpiece of his doubt and consternation about the consumption and accumulation of wealth of his contemporaries. This is a kind of exploitation that in *Paradise Lost*, Satan uses to indicate “power” when he demands his forces to pursue “honour, dominion, glory and renown” during the war in Heaven (VI.422). Also, Satan employs it in the same way to describe the “spacious empire” of Chaos (II.974). We can trace this in the poem’s text, when prior to the rebel angels’ efforts to mine the materials for Pandemonium in Hell, they encounter identical situated material for wreaking mischief within or under the soil of Heaven. Undoubtedly, the satanic crew make bad use of what they find in both Hell and Heaven’s soil. They dig up the minerals especially the “gold” through skillful ways to beautify the stately palace of Pandemonium and thus gather the resources to use them as weapons to rebel against God. This way, Satan organizes labour and resource exploitation in the company of the rebel angels whose actions resemble the industrial processes of refining, reducing and then storing the natural resources in order to commodify and redirected them to serve domination:

“in a moment up they [the rebel angels] turned  
They found, they mingled, and with subtle art,  
Concocted and adusted they reduced  
To blackest grain, and into store conveyed.” (VI.509-15)

The EIC made bad use only in the sense that she employed it against the native population. Similarly, the EIC exploited everything it found to raise its capital. The gold and other natural resources were extracted and robbed. Davis (2001, p.79) clarifies this and states, “The East India Company’s monopoly on grain trade and forced cash-crop cultivation (indigo, opium) turned a drought into a catastrophe... At least 10 million died while Company profits soared.” Chhabria (2019) points out that the top brass of the EIC was successful in achieving its lucrative purposes precisely because it defended its chartered monopoly in the marketplaces of eastern India. More interestingly, the English language initially borrowed the Hindustani slang for plunder: loot. To simplify it further, items such as silken embroidery, golden statues of Hindu gods and coats of elephant armour were all looted.

Soon (2002), enumerates that Satan and his crew glorify a merchant “fleet” on a voyage “close sailing from Bengala, or the isles / Of Ternate and Tidore, whence merchants bring / Their spicy drugs... on the trading flood” (II, 636-41). It represents the Eurasian spice trade and the way European adventurers got engaged in “the work of the devil.” This quotation is representative of the EIC’s devilish aims and works against the native populations. This paper notes that Satan is depicted as being “pleased” by the “odorous sweets” (IV, 156-58) of Eden; here it represents colonial urban centres, paralleling the experiences of traders who are drawn to the scents of spices as Said (2016, p.407) put it that “But Orientalism is a field with considerable geographical ambition.” George (1956) argues that at a more sophisticated level, their patron is portrayed as one of “the great Merchants of this world” who, in Milton’s words, “abuse the people, like poor Indians with beads and glasses.” Just like the EIC abused the natives at the back of the British government. Wright (1982) has pointed out that the Devil’s voyage to the New World has been accompanied throughout by similes drawn from the familiar seventeenth-century world of merchant adventurers seeking the riches of the Indies across “the Trading Flood.” Satan, in the summary of the Fall, where he gives a speech to his fellow angels in Book X, describes his exploits as a successful business venture which has produced a huge profit:

“Him by fraud I have seduc’d  
..., To rule, as over all he should have rul’d  
A World who would not purchase with a bruise...” (X.485-503)

Dalrymple (2019, p.22) argues that an international corporation was in the process of transforming itself into a colonial aggressor, which commenced grabbing immense chunks of India in the mid-eighteenth century. Being headquartered in one tiny office in London, the Company managed to ruthlessly exploit the colonial trade through unstable corporate predators. Clive, the company’s founding father, said that a single for-profit corporation succeeded in India’s transition to colonialism. In

his words, "Again, we are in a court setting, with bowing attendants on all sides and trumpets blowing, and again an Englishman is standing in front of the Mughal". Cerrotti (2021, p.81) sourly observed that the colonisation of America had "as yet never been generally undertaken in pity to men's souls, but in hope to possess land of those infidels, or of gain by commerce."

Milton's depiction of Pandemonium shows how creation, though architecturally magnificent, can serve morally corrupt ends. According to Marjara (2009, p.91), Pandemonium serves as an alternative cosmos for the rebel angels, one that has no space for God's existence. Hiltner (2003) shows that Pandemonium becomes a playground for philosophical speculation where the rebel angels even further detach themselves from God. Similarly, the EIC also abandoned the philosophical and ethical considerations of the native population while exercising its power. For constructing the base of Pandemonium's substructure, called the edifice, the breath of life is employed. Pandemonium in itself is devoid of pure God-centered hope or divine inspiration. It is merely a contaminated exhalation and thus a false hope. The EIC's false hope was shattered at the end when the British left their colonial urban centres. For the EIC, God's presence is deemed in the ethical sense, which has no space in its exploitative manner.

Bhattacharyya (2018, p.1040) sees in EIC a particular form of statehood. He examines the Company's governing rules as an extension of the state in Georgian England, which includes not merely the reigning concepts of political economy but also the distinctive technologies of rule, such as cartography, quantification, finance, documentation, etc. Indeed, the EIC paid the way for the English government to finally seize the whole of the subcontinent. The power which the company exercised was, nevertheless, a mirror of the state administration with extractive aims. In most cases, the company justified its cruelties and suppression with the pretext of bringing trade and connectivity for the people, but in reality, no such favours were delivered. It projected itself as a "Civilized Force" to free India from "Backwardness", thus disguising its coerced power as benevolence. Finally, Satan's "self-fashioning" as a rebel mirrors the EIC's paradoxical rhetoric of liberty amid exploitation. The company portrayed itself as the harbinger of economic prosperity and urban mechanisation at the expense of distortion and the grabbing of public lands and property. Zwierlein (2015, p.14) states that Satan's experience of isolation in himself is then an image of "the modern tragedy of materialist schemes."

## 5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Milton's Pandemonium operates not merely as a theological or poetic construct but as an incisive allegorical critique of the structures underpinning early modern imperial capitalism. Through a New Historicist combined with Colonial Urbanism lenses, *Paradise Lost* becomes a searing commentary on the exploitative urbanism and financial tyranny institutionalised by the East India Company. The infernal city of Pandemonium, forged by Satan's fallen architects, mirrors the grand yet morally vacuous infrastructures erected by the Company cities built not only from stone and mortar but from coerced labour, racial hierarchies, ecological ruin, and financial abstraction. In both the literary and historical realms, monumental architecture masks systemic violence, while governance operates through deception, domination, and spectacle.

Milton's vision prefigures modern critiques of corporate imperialism: it discloses how authoritarian ambition cloaks itself in the language of trade, civilisation, and order. By juxtaposing Milton's infernal city with the EIC's extractive networks and urban laboratories of control, this paper reveals the deep affinities between poetic imagination and political economy. As such, Pandemonium is not merely Hell's capital; it is a prototype for capitalist modernity itself, one in which cities become engines of domination and theology is reconfigured in service of empire. In our contemporary moment, where multinational corporations often exceed the power of states, Milton's epic offers a hauntingly prescient reflection on the origins and ongoing entanglements of capital, violence, and governance.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity, the East India Company will be referred to as "EIC" throughout this paper.

<sup>2</sup> a pandal is a temporary structure often used in religious festivals.