CINEFORUM
ISSN: 0009-7039
Vol. 66. No. S9, 2026 (Special Issue S9)

Women in Isolation: A Feminist Reading of Manjula Padmanabhan's Astro-Nuts

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ABSTRACT
This paper examines the representation of gender, exclusion, and isolation in Manjula Padmanabhan's science fiction satire Astro-Nuts: An Intergalactic Comedy. Rather than treating isolation only as a private emotional experience, the paper reads it as a political condition produced when individuals are present within institutions but denied meaningful influence. The play's imagined Galactic Union provides a satirical setting in which human delegates must account for the environmental and ethical failures of Earth. Their inability to cooperate exposes the limitations of political systems organised around national pride, status, and competition. Within this collective failure, the marginalisation of women's voices offers a productive point of entry for feminist analysis. The paper draws on Simone de Beauvoir's account of woman as the socially constituted "Other," Judith Butler's analysis of gender as performative, Virginia Woolf's argument for women's material and intellectual space, and Donna Haraway's account of the entanglement of technology and power. Using qualitative close reading and contextual interpretation, the study considers the play's speculative setting, comic form, institutional space, gendered speech, and environmental satire. It argues that Astro-Nuts presents isolation as both a symptom of unequal structures and a means of exposing their contradictions. The play does not offer a simple opposition between women and men; instead, its wider humanist critique shows how domination, rivalry, and refusal of responsibility weaken collective life. A feminist reading therefore reveals that meaningful inclusion requires more than physical presence or technological advancement: it requires changes in the distribution of authority, the practice of listening, and the ethical relationship between humanity and its environment.
Keywords: Manjula Padmanabhan; Astro-Nuts; feminism; isolation; gender; science fiction; technology; environmental ethics

1. INTRODUCTION

Manjula Padmanabhan's writing frequently brings social power into contact with speculative situations, exposing the assumptions that ordinary institutions often leave unexamined. In Astro-Nuts: An Intergalactic Comedy, a gathering of human and nonhuman representatives considers whether Earth deserves inclusion in a wider Galactic Union. The premise allows the playwright to place familiar human conflicts inside an unfamiliar political space. The futuristic setting is not simply an escape from the present. It magnifies persistent problems: competition among groups, the pursuit of prestige, environmental irresponsibility, and the inability to recognise the consequences of collective behaviour.

The play's comedy is important to its criticism. The absurdity of a delegation that must demonstrate humanity's worthiness becomes a way of examining the distance between human claims to superiority and human conduct. Earth's representatives do not necessarily act as a coherent group. Their disagreements and attempts to protect their own positions make it difficult to respond to the larger questions before them. The Galactic Union therefore functions as more than a science fiction backdrop. It is an institutional arena in which power, accountability, and belonging are tested.

A feminist reading of the play asks who is heard within this arena, whose contributions are treated as authoritative, and how gendered expectations shape participation. Isolation in this context should not be reduced to literal solitude or to the experience of a single astronaut cut off from Earth. The more defensible interpretation, based on the play's assembly setting, is that isolation can occur within a crowd or institution. A character may be physically present yet remain intellectually marginalised, interrupted, or denied the power to influence decisions. Such exclusion is social and political before it becomes psychological.

This paper argues that Astro-Nuts represents isolation as a consequence of unequal participation and failed collective responsibility. Its futuristic assembly makes visible the persistence of patriarchal habits in settings that

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appear technologically advanced. At the same time, the play's critique extends beyond gender alone. Environmental damage, political rivalry, and moral evasion are presented as connected failures. Feminist analysis helps clarify how the distribution of voice and authority shapes these broader failures, while the play's satirical form prevents its argument from becoming a simple division between virtuous women and irresponsible men.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RATIONALE

The central problem addressed here is the contradiction between formal inclusion and meaningful participation. The Galactic Union convenes representatives in a shared space, yet the existence of a forum does not guarantee equality, cooperation, or ethical deliberation. This contradiction has a feminist dimension because women may be included in institutional settings without being granted equivalent authority. Their presence can become symbolic rather than consequential when dominant speakers control the agenda or dismiss alternative perspectives.

Isolation is therefore understood in three connected ways. First, it is institutional: individuals and groups can be excluded from decision-making despite being physically present. Second, it is relational: rivalry and mistrust prevent participants from forming a meaningful collective. Third, it is ethical: humanity's environmental conduct separates it from the values that would make membership in a larger community possible. These forms of isolation overlap, but they should not be treated as identical. The play's satire allows them to be read together without assuming that every character experiences them in the same way.

The rationale for this study is that feminist criticism can illuminate the relationship between gender and the wider political structure of the play. Instead of treating women's marginalisation as an isolated theme, this paper connects it to the distribution of credibility, the organisation of debate, and the failure to take responsibility for shared problems.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study has four objectives. It examines how Astro-Nuts represents exclusion within an institutional setting; analyses the relationship between gendered authority and the distribution of speech; considers how science fiction and comedy expose the contradictions of technological and political progress; and explores the relationship between feminist inclusion and collective environmental responsibility.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The paper is guided by four questions. How does the Galactic Union setting turn isolation into a social and political condition? In what ways can the marginalisation of women's voices be understood through feminist literary theory? How do satire and speculative fiction expose the limits of institutional inclusion? Finally, how does the play connect gendered power with humanity's broader failure to practise ethical responsibility?

5. REVIEW OF RELEVANT CRITICAL IDEAS

Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex offers a foundational account of womanhood as a social position rather than a purely natural destiny. Her analysis of woman as "Other" helps explain how a group can be present in a social order while still being defined in relation to a dominant subject. Applied to Astro-Nuts, this framework directs attention to the difference between being represented and being recognised as an authoritative participant. The feminist question is not simply whether women are present in the assembly, but whether their speech is allowed to shape the decisions made there.

Judith Butler's Gender Trouble challenges the assumption that gender identity is a fixed essence. Butler's account of performativity helps explain how gender norms are maintained through repeated acts, conventions, and expectations. In a political gathering, authority may be associated with assertive speech, competitive conduct, and the performance of confidence. When such behaviours are treated as naturally masculine or as the only credible form of leadership, institutional habits reproduce gender hierarchy. A feminist reading of the play can therefore examine not only what characters say but also the standards by which their contributions are judged.

Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own is useful for thinking about space as a condition of intellectual agency. Woolf's argument concerns the material and cultural circumstances that allow women to think and create independently. The play's assembly is not a private room, but Woolf's broader insight remains relevant: access to a space does not automatically produce freedom within it. Participation requires conditions under which a person can develop an argument, speak without systematic dismissal, and exercise influence. The institutional setting of Astro-Nuts can thus be read as a public counterpart to the question of women's access to intellectual and political space.

Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" questions simple divisions between human and machine, nature and culture, and organism and technology. Her work is relevant to a science fiction play because technological

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advancement does not necessarily dismantle existing hierarchies. Technology may alter the setting and scale of political life while leaving unequal systems of authority intact. Astro-Nuts invites a related question: if humanity seeks recognition from a technologically and socially wider community, is technological development enough, or must ethical and political behaviour also change?

These theoretical approaches are complementary rather than interchangeable. De Beauvoir helps identify the structure of othering; Butler explains the repetition of gender norms; Woolf foregrounds the conditions required for intellectual agency; and Haraway complicates assumptions that technology automatically produces liberation. Together, they support a reading of isolation as a structural condition shaped by gender, institutional practice, and the values attached to progress.

5.1 Feminist Literary Criticism and the Politics of Representation

Feminist literary criticism examines how literary texts represent gender, distribute narrative authority, and reproduce or challenge assumptions attached to femininity and masculinity. It does not merely ask whether women appear in a text; it also asks how they are represented, whether their experiences are treated as meaningful, and which voices are authorised to define reality. Elaine Showalter's work on women's writing helped establish the importance of examining women's literary traditions and the cultural conditions in which women write. For the present study, this critical approach provides a basis for investigating whether the assembly in Astro-Nuts offers women meaningful participation or only nominal inclusion.

5.2 Simone de Beauvoir: Otherness and Socially Constructed Womanhood

In The Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir analyses woman as historically positioned as the "Other" in relation to man, who is treated as the universal subject. This concept is useful for reading institutional settings in which a person may be physically present but remain peripheral to the production of authority. Applied to Astro-Nuts, otherness directs attention to the difference between representation and recognition. The question is not simply whether women attend the Galactic Union gathering, but whether their ideas can influence the discussion and its decisions. Toril Moi's reassessment of Beauvoir's literary thought cautions against reducing her work to a slogan: Beauvoir's account of social situation and freedom offers a method for analysing how unequal conditions constrain agency (Moi).

5.3 Judith Butler: Gender Performativity and Institutional Authority

Judith Butler's Gender Trouble challenges the assumption that gender is a stable inner essence that naturally determines behaviour. Gender norms are sustained through repeated acts and conventions that make particular identities and performances appear natural. This framework can help explain why assertive, competitive, or self-promoting speech may be treated as authoritative while collaborative or ethically focused contributions may be discounted. In a political assembly, authority is not only held; it is performed and recognised through social expectations. A Butlerian reading of Astro-Nuts therefore examines how the delegates' conduct reproduces familiar gender codes without assuming that all men or all women behave in the same way.

5.4 Virginia Woolf: Space, Material Conditions, and Intellectual Agency

Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own argues that women's intellectual and creative freedom depends on material and social conditions, not simply on individual talent. The "room" is both a literal space and a figure for independence, privacy, resources, and the opportunity to develop thought. Although Astro-Nuts stages its conflict in a public, intergalactic institution rather than a domestic room, Woolf's argument remains relevant. Access to a meeting does not guarantee a person's ability to speak, be heard, or influence decisions. Woolf's work allows the present study to distinguish formal inclusion from substantive agency and to understand isolation as a condition that can be produced by institutional arrangements.

5.5 Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar: Gendered Authority and Voice

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's The Madwoman in the Attic examines literary traditions through which women writers have negotiated gendered representations and patriarchal authority. Their work is not a direct study of Padmanabhan's play, but it contributes a broader critical vocabulary for considering how women's voices are authorised, contained, or interpreted within dominant cultural frameworks. The delegates in Astro-Nuts are not assumed to reproduce the same literary figures analysed by Gilbert and Gubar. Rather, their study reinforces the need to ask how women's speech is evaluated in systems where masculine authority has become a norm.

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5.6 Donna Haraway: Technology, Power, and the Limits of Technological Progress

Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" questions rigid boundaries between human and machine, nature and culture, and organism and technology. Her argument is relevant to speculative drama because technological transformation does not automatically dismantle social hierarchy. Technologies are developed and used within political and cultural systems; they may challenge existing boundaries, but they can also reproduce unequal relations. Astro-Nuts places humanity before a wider community, yet the central test is not merely technical capability. The delegates must confront questions of conduct, cooperation, and responsibility. Haraway's work helps frame the play's futuristic setting as a critique of the assumption that technological advancement necessarily produces ethical or social progress.

5.7 bell hooks and the Need to Avoid Essentialist Feminism

bell hooks's Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center challenges feminist approaches that treat the experiences of a privileged group of women as universal. Her work encourages criticism to examine how gender interacts with power and exclusion, rather than treating "women" as a single, uniform category. This caution is important in reading Astro-Nuts. The analysis should not claim that women are naturally more ethical, cooperative, or environmentally conscious than men. Instead, it should ask how particular contributions are received and which institutional habits reward rivalry over collaboration. This non-essentialist approach makes the argument more precise: gendered marginalisation matters, but it operates within a broader political culture that can weaken collective responsibility.

5.8 Environmental Ethics and the Collective Dimension of the Play

The play's concern with Earth's environmental condition broadens the discussion beyond individual gender relations. The delegates' inability to respond collectively to planetary problems raises questions about responsibility, denial, and the limits of self-interest. Feminist criticism can examine whose concerns are treated as central and whose warnings are ignored. However, the paper does not assume that environmental care is naturally feminine. Rather, it investigates how an institution evaluates ethical arguments and whether short-term prestige displaces collective survival. The environmental dimension thus connects the politics of listening with the politics of responsibility.

5.9 Critical Context and Research Gap

The primary object of analysis in this paper remains Padmanabhan's Astro-Nuts: An Intergalactic Comedy. The playwright's official bibliography identifies the play as a 2015 Hachette India Children's Books publication and notes that it was originally titled General Assembly and published by Scholastic India in Plays for Schools in 2007 (Padmanabhan, "Prose & Plays"). This publication history matters because researchers should identify the edition actually consulted and should not transfer page numbers from one edition to another. A 2015 listing in The Book Review also records the play and a review by Debashis Chakraborty, providing evidence of contemporaneous reception (Chakraborty). These sources provide bibliographic and reception context, but they do not by themselves establish a developed scholarly consensus about feminist isolation in the play.

The theoretical sources discussed above offer established approaches to otherness, gender performance, intellectual space, voice, and technology. They are not all direct studies of Astro-Nuts, and the paper does not present them as such. The research gap addressed here is narrower: this paper brings these concepts together to examine how institutional participation, gendered authority, and collective environmental responsibility intersect in the play's intergalactic assembly. This is an interpretive contribution rather than a claim that no previous scholar has studied the play. A comprehensive literature review for journal submission should additionally search scholarly databases for peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, theses, and reviews that discuss Astro-Nuts specifically.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses qualitative textual analysis. The primary text is Manjula Padmanabhan's Astro-Nuts: An Intergalactic Comedy. The method involves close reading of the play's premise, setting, conflict, character interactions, satirical contrasts, and representation of institutional participation. The analysis is informed by feminist literary theory, particularly the concepts of othering, gender performativity, intellectual space, and the politics of technology.

The paper distinguishes textual description from theoretical interpretation. The Galactic Union gathering and the delegates' disagreements are treated as elements of the play's dramatic situation. Their significance for gender and isolation is developed through interpretation rather than presented as a claim that the play explicitly states a

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single feminist thesis. The study does not use interviews, surveys, or statistical data; it is a literary analysis and does not claim to be an empirical study.

For academic accuracy, direct quotations and page references must be checked against the exact edition used by the researcher. The working draft supplied for revision included several quotations attributed to pages of Astro-Nuts, but their wording and locations could not be independently verified from the supplied material. They are therefore not reproduced here as authenticated quotations. The analysis instead relies on paraphrase of the plot elements described in the draft. Page-specific textual examples should be inserted only after comparison with the published play.

7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 The Galactic Union as an Institutional Space

The Galactic Union is the play's central dramatic device. It places Earth within a wider community and makes admission conditional on an evaluation of human conduct. This premise reverses the familiar assumption that humanity is entitled to occupy the highest position simply because it is human. The representatives must confront the possibility that technological achievement and claims of superiority do not establish moral maturity.

The assembly also makes institutional space visible. A meeting room may appear neutral because it gathers different representatives under a shared procedure. Yet institutions are shaped by the behaviour of those who occupy them: who controls discussion, who interrupts, what counts as evidence, and whose priorities become central. The human delegates' inability to cooperate suggests that the presence of a formal forum is not sufficient to produce a public good. The institution exposes rather than resolves the conflicts among its participants.

From a feminist perspective, the assembly can be read as a test of substantive participation. Inclusion is meaningful only when individuals can contribute to deliberation and influence outcomes. If women's interventions are interrupted, dismissed, or overshadowed by more aggressive speakers, then formal presence does not amount to equality. Their isolation is not geographical; it is produced by the rules, habits, and power relations of the gathering. The play's speculative distance makes this pattern easier to recognise because the audience encounters it in an imagined intergalactic institution rather than in a familiar parliament, workplace, or conference.

7.2 Gendered Speech and the Politics of Listening

Speech is a central resource in any political assembly. Speakers seek not only to communicate information but also to establish credibility, define the problem, and influence collective action. A feminist analysis asks whether credibility is distributed equally or whether some styles of speaking are treated as inherently more authoritative than others. In patriarchal settings, forceful self-assertion can be mistaken for competence, while collaborative, cautious, or ethically oriented contributions may be undervalued.

The supplied draft characterises the women in Astro-Nuts as attempting to raise progressive concerns while male voices dominate the discussion. This pattern, if verified against the primary text, supports an analysis of gendered listening. Marginalisation does not always require an explicit prohibition on speech. It can operate through interruption, ridicule, redirection, or the failure to respond to a contribution. These practices make a speaker visible but ineffective: the person has spoken, yet the institution behaves as if nothing consequential has been said.

Butler's account of performativity helps explain why these habits persist. Gender hierarchy is reproduced through repeated social expectations, including expectations about how authority should sound and appear. The point is not that all men speak aggressively or all women speak collaboratively. Such a claim would merely replace one stereotype with another. Rather, the play's political comedy can be read as exposing a system in which particular behaviours are rewarded and alternative forms of participation are ignored.

A feminist interpretation must also avoid presenting women as automatically ethical or men as inherently destructive. The more persuasive argument is structural: when the assembly rewards competition and personal prestige, it weakens the possibility of careful listening regardless of the speaker's gender. The marginalisation of women becomes one visible symptom of a broader failure to recognise contributions on their merits. Feminist criticism therefore asks for a change in the conditions of public speech, not simply the substitution of one group of speakers for another.

7.3 Isolation as Exclusion Rather Than Solitude

The concept of isolation is most useful when it distinguishes physical separation from social exclusion. A person may be surrounded by others and still be isolated if meaningful communication is impossible. In Astro-Nuts, the assembly offers a collective setting, yet the delegates' rivalry undermines collective belonging. Their inability to act together creates divisions within the human group and separates Earth from the wider community it hopes to join.

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Women's marginalisation within the assembly can be understood through the same distinction. Being invited to a discussion is not equivalent to being heard. Being permitted to speak is not equivalent to being taken seriously. Isolation arises when a participant cannot establish a reciprocal relationship with the group or cannot translate insight into action. This form of isolation is political because it is produced by patterns of recognition and authority, rather than by the individual's personal disposition.

De Beauvoir's account of woman as "Other" provides a way to understand this condition. The dominant group establishes itself as the norm and treats other voices as secondary, exceptional, or less credible. The result is a form of presence without full belonging. Woolf's argument about women's intellectual space adds a material and institutional dimension: freedom depends not only on access but also on the conditions that allow thought to develop and be recognised.

Isolation is not necessarily transformed into liberation simply because it produces reflection. The play's institutional setting suggests that private awareness cannot alone correct public inequality. A person may recognise exclusion without gaining the power to change it. Any claim that isolation automatically empowers women would therefore be too simple. The more cautious conclusion is that recognising isolation can be a first step toward resistance, but transformation requires changes in the structures that distribute voice and authority.

7.4 Science Fiction, Technology, and the Limits of Progress

Science fiction allows Padmanabhan to enlarge contemporary problems by placing them in a futuristic and intergalactic context. The Galactic Union setting makes political conflict appear strange, but the underlying behaviours remain recognisable. National pride, rivalry, and attempts to avoid responsibility continue even when the scale of the setting expands beyond Earth. The imagined future therefore questions the belief that progress in technology necessarily produces progress in ethics.

Haraway's work is useful here because it resists a simple opposition between technology and humanity. Technologies are developed, used, and interpreted within social relations. They can support communication and cooperation, but they can also reproduce existing hierarchies. In the play, the presence of an advanced intergalactic order does not make the human delegates wiser or more united. The question of admission depends on conduct, not merely on technical sophistication.

This distinction matters for feminist analysis. Technology is sometimes represented as a route beyond the body and beyond social limitations. Yet a technologically advanced institution can still reproduce gendered assumptions about leadership and credibility. If the habits of the present are carried into the future, new machines or new environments will not automatically produce equality. The play's satire consequently challenges technological optimism when it is detached from social accountability.

The same argument applies to the environmental crisis that frames the assembly. Ecological damage is not simply a technical problem requiring more efficient tools. It also raises questions of responsibility, collective decision-making, and willingness to change established practices. Humanity's isolation from the Galactic Union becomes a moral and political issue: the species seeks membership in a larger community while struggling to demonstrate that it can care for the conditions of shared life.

7.5 Environmental Responsibility and Collective Ethics

The environmental dimension of Astro-Nuts broadens the paper's feminist argument. The play's premise requires human representatives to answer for Earth's condition. Environmental degradation is presented in the supplied draft as one of the reasons humanity's claim to membership is uncertain. The delegates' tendency to quarrel and deflect blame mirrors the difficulty of addressing problems that require coordinated action.

A feminist reading can connect this failure to the politics of listening and recognition. Collective crises are not solved merely by gathering representatives; they require the capacity to hear uncomfortable evidence, acknowledge responsibility, and prioritise long-term welfare over immediate prestige. If a political forum systematically sidelines voices that emphasise sustainability or ethical accountability, it loses information and moral perspective that may be essential to its survival.

This does not mean that women possess an innate relationship with nature or that environmental care is naturally feminine. Such a claim would reproduce essentialist gender assumptions. Instead, the analysis concerns the value assigned to particular arguments and the institutional conditions under which they can influence policy. Where cooperative and sustainability-focused proposals are dismissed as less important than status or rivalry, the problem lies in the system of values governing the discussion.

The Galactic Union's judgment functions as a mirror. The aliens' position invites the audience to consider whether humanity's self-image is supported by its conduct. The possibility of inclusion depends on ethical change rather

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than on rhetorical claims of superiority. This structure links feminist concerns with a wider critique of political institutions: a community cannot become just by declaring itself advanced while continuing to exclude voices and avoid shared responsibilities.

7.6 Comedy and Satire as Critical Methods

The comic form is central to the play's critical force. Satire exposes the distance between what characters claim and what their behaviour demonstrates. The premise of an intergalactic evaluation is humorous because it makes humanity answerable to outsiders, but the humour also unsettles human assumptions of superiority. The delegates' quarrels become more than individual weaknesses; they reveal the fragility of political arrangements built on prestige and competition.

Comedy can make exclusion visible without presenting it only as solemn tragedy. When characters behave absurdly in a setting that is supposed to represent serious diplomacy, the audience is encouraged to question the institution's claims to authority. The futuristic frame creates critical distance from everyday politics while preserving recognisable patterns of behaviour. In this way, science fiction and satire work together: the setting is extraordinary, but the power dynamics are familiar.

The feminist value of satire lies in its ability to expose the conventions that make unequal treatment seem normal. If a speaker's dominance is treated as evidence of competence, comedy can reveal the gap between confidence and sound judgment. If the assembly's procedures appear inclusive but its decisions remain shaped by rivalry, satire exposes the gap between formal equality and substantive participation. The audience is invited to judge not only the characters but also the social rules that make their conduct possible.

At the same time, humour should not be mistaken for a complete solution. Exposing a contradiction does not automatically remove it. The play's critical achievement is to make the contradiction legible and to invite reflection on the changes required for genuine cooperation.

7.7 Beyond a Simple Opposition Between Women and Men

A rigorous feminist reading should resist reducing the play to a conflict in which women represent virtue and men represent failure. The supplied draft suggests that women's contributions are often more progressive, collaborative, or ethically attentive, while male participants are frequently associated with competition and self-interest. These contrasts can be analytically useful, but they must be tied to specific textual evidence and not generalised into claims about the natural character of either gender.

The broader satirical structure points toward a humanist argument. Earth's representatives collectively struggle to demonstrate the maturity expected of a member of a wider community. The problem is not confined to one individual or one gender. Rather, the play questions a political culture in which status takes precedence over accountability. Women's marginalisation matters because it shows how the culture distributes authority unequally, but the larger challenge is to transform the culture itself.

This qualification strengthens rather than weakens the feminist interpretation. It shifts the argument from biological essentialism to institutional practice. The question becomes how authority is produced, how speech is evaluated, and whether the group can make decisions in response to evidence and ethical need. Feminist criticism then contributes to a wider analysis of democracy, diplomacy, and collective responsibility.

The play's unresolved or open-ended emphasis on self-awareness can be read as a demand for structural change rather than a promise of easy redemption. Recognition of failure is necessary, but it must lead to different forms of participation and action. For women, this means more than being allowed to enter the room. It means being recognised as participants whose ideas can alter the course of deliberation.

8. FINDINGS

The analysis produces five principal findings. First, the Galactic Union provides a speculative institutional setting in which questions of belonging and authority become visible. Second, isolation can be social and political even when characters share a physical space. Third, gendered exclusion is best understood through practices of recognition, interruption, and unequal credibility rather than through assumptions about fixed male and female traits. Fourth, the play's science fiction setting questions the belief that technological advancement automatically brings ethical progress. Fifth, the environmental crisis and the marginalisation of voices are connected through a shared failure of collective responsibility.

These findings are interpretive conclusions from close reading, not empirical claims about audiences or contemporary institutions. Further research could compare the play's representation of gender with Padmanabhan's other dramatic works, particularly Harvest and Lights Out, while maintaining careful distinctions between their plots, forms, and contexts.

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9. CONCLUSION

Manjula Padmanabhan's Astro-Nuts: An Intergalactic Comedy uses a futuristic gathering to question humanity's assumptions about progress, authority, and belonging. The Galactic Union becomes a stage on which Earth's representatives must confront their inability to cooperate and their failure to take responsibility for shared problems. A feminist reading shows that these failures have a gendered dimension when women are present in institutional spaces but are not granted equal authority or serious attention.

The paper has argued that isolation in the play is not best understood only as physical solitude. It can emerge within a crowd when a participant's speech is dismissed or when institutional habits prevent meaningful influence. De Beauvoir's analysis of othering, Butler's account of gender performativity, Woolf's concern with intellectual space, and Haraway's critique of technological boundaries provide complementary ways to interpret this condition. Together, they reveal that inclusion requires more than formal access: it depends on the distribution of credibility, the ability to participate in decision-making, and the willingness to listen.

The play's satire also prevents a narrow reading of gender conflict. Its criticism extends to rivalry, environmental irresponsibility, and the human tendency to protect status instead of accepting accountability. Technology and futuristic institutions cannot guarantee justice if the values governing them remain unchanged. Ultimately, Astro-Nuts invites readers to understand meaningful progress as an ethical and collective achievement. A community becomes more inclusive not merely when marginalised people are present, but when their voices can shape decisions and when all participants accept responsibility for the world they share

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