



Oxymorons in Tamil Literature

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Abstract

Oxymorons in Tamil literature is not just a stylistic choice but a reflection of the culture's deep engagement with the complexities of life. They enrich the language by adding layers of meaning, making the expressions more vivid, profound, and resonant. The use of oxymorons highlights the beauty of the Tamil language, showcasing its ability to convey nuanced emotions and philosophical ideas with elegance and depth. In literature, an oxymoron is a powerful rhetorical device that combines two contradictory words to create a unique expression. Tamil literature, with its rich tradition of poetry and epics, has long used oxymorons to explore and express the intricate nature of human experiences. Tamil poets have employed oxymorons extensively. Oxymorons are a unique and powerful rhetorical device in language, offering several distinctive qualities that make them special. Characteristic features of Oxymorons are Irony, Emphasizing conflict, Memorable phrasing, Expressing complex emotions, high lighting dualities, Aesthetic beauty, paradoxical nature, Richness in meaning, Enhancing the depth of expression, Versatility across contexts and so on. Tamil devotional works like Thevaram, Thiruvasaagam, Thirumandiram, Thiruvisaippa, thiruppugazh, Thiruarutpa employs oxymorons as a powerful literary device to express the profound and often paradoxical nature of divine experiences. The use of oxymorons in the hymns adds to the poetic beauty and spiritual resonance of the Divya Prabandham, making it a timeless work of Tamil devotional literature.

Keywords: Irony, conflict, Memorable, Expressing emotions, dualities, Aesthetic beauty, rhetorical device.

INTRODUCTION:

In literature, an oxymoron is a powerful rhetorical device that combines two contradictory words to create a unique expression, to highlight a complex concept poet often use oxymorons to provoke thought, create irony, convey a deeper meaning. Two contradictory terms are combined to create a figure of speech is called an oxymoron which always have paradoxical effect. Oxymorons used to highlight the complexity of a concept by juxtaposing opposing ideas. Oxymorons can be used to increase the depth of the meaning which will automatically create more complexity to a work. It will make the readers and listeners to think more critically, analitically about the in depth meaning of the words being used. Oxymoron reflects certain angst that is a feeling of anxirtyand worry about a situation. It is also used to point out conflicts. There are no exact synonyms for the word Oxymoron but some words that are similar are paradox, antimony, paradoxism, Ironic. The exact meaning of Oxymoron. It is a Greek word Oxus means sharp, moron means dull. So, the word itself has contradictory terms. In Tamil it can be called Muran thodai. Muran means contradictory. Here the word Oxymoron which is from Greece has the tamil word "moron" with in itself which shows the root word is from tamil.

Characteristic features of Oxymoron:

1. Oxymoron reflects certain angst that is a feeling of anxirtyand worry about a situation. It is also used to point out conflicts - friendly fight painfully beautiful
2. Oxymorons are commonly seen in everyday speech - Awfully good, original copy
3. Oxymoron is one of the best tools to describe a fact that started of as a secret- it is an open secret
4. It is a poetic device to conveydeep meanings and contradictions in abrief, succinct and impactful way.

5. Oxymorons are employed to create strong emotions which will highlight the complexity of human life which include love, human experience and relationship. The emotions conveyed through oxymorons are strong and powerful. Example - good grief, Joyful sadness, Sad smile. Sugamaana vali in Tamil.

6. In literature, an oxymoron is a powerful rhetorical device that combines two contradictory words to create a unique expression, to highlight a complex concept. Poets often use oxymorons to provoke thought, create irony, convey a deeper meaning.

Purpose of Oxymorons in Literature:

Tamil literature, with its rich tradition of poetry and epics, has long used oxymorons to explore and express the intricate nature of human experiences. To explore and express complex ideas in a concise and thought-provoking manner, oxymorons are a highly valuable tool for the authors. They have been used in Tamil literature to convey complex ideas and emotions. To emphasize the paradoxical nature of life, emotions, and experiences, Tamil poets have employed oxymorons extensively. Oxymorons are a unique and powerful rhetorical device in language, offering several distinctive qualities that make them special. In literature, an oxymoron is a powerful rhetorical device that combines two opposing or contradictory words to create a unique expression or to highlight a complex concept. Authors often use oxymorons to provoke thought, create irony, or convey a deeper meaning.

- 1. Irony:** Oxymorons can develop a sense of irony, where the literal meaning is different from the actual meaning. Oxymorons can introduce irony or humor into a statement.
- 2. Emphasizing Conflict:** By giving contradictory terms, authors can highlight conflicts within characters or situations.
- 3. Memorable Phrasing:** Oxymorons make the word or phrase memorable which will often stick in the reader's mind because of their paradoxical nature. Because of their unusual and striking nature, oxymorons are often memorable. Because of the contradiction within the phrase, it stands out and makes it more likely to be remembered by the reader or listener.
- 4. Expressing Complex Emotions:** Oxymorons help convey the complexity of human emotions, such as the coexistence of joy and sorrow. Oxymorons are particularly effective in evoking complex emotions like love and hate, pleasure and pain, with simple words.
- 5. Highlighting Dualities:** The dualities of life, such as light and darkness, love and hatred, or life and death, are often explored in Tamil literature through oxymorons.
- 6. Aesthetic Beauty:** The use of oxymorons adds a layer of aesthetic beauty to the language, making the verses more profound and impactful.
- 7. Paradoxical Nature:** Oxymorons combine two seemingly contradictory terms, creating a phrase that, at first glance, appears self-contradictory.
- 8. Richness in Meaning:** An oxymoron often conveys complex and nuanced meanings that might be difficult to express with straightforward language.
- 9. Enhancing the Depth of Expression:** By combining contradictory terms, oxymorons can add depth to the expression which leads to a richer understanding and appreciation of the text.
- 10. Versatility Across Contexts:** Oxymorons are versatile and can be used across various contexts, from everyday speech to high literature.

Oxymorons in Tamil Literature:

1. Oxymorons in Thirukkural:

1. Irul Sēr Iruvinaiyum Sērā Iraivan - (Kural-5)

: "The Lord, who does not engage in darkness and dual deeds." The verse presents the idea of God being beyond dualities and darkness, using a form of paradoxical language.

2. Inbaththul inbam payakkum ihalennum thunbaththul thunbam kedin – (kural – 854)

: Here the joy and pain and pain present a paradox which highlights the interconnectedness of joy and sorrow. In this Thirukkural oxymoron is employed to express intense knowledge and great wisdom in a concise and meaningful way.

2. Oxymorons in Thevaram:

These hymns are rich in emotional depth, spiritual intensity, and literary beauty, praising Lord Siva. Like other Tamil devotional works, Thevaram also employs oxymorons as a powerful literary device to express the profound and often paradoxical nature of divine experiences.

2.1. Thirugnana Sambandar Thevaram:

1. "Vaazhinum Saavinum" – 3.4.2- (living and dead)
2. "Nanavinum kanavinum" – 3.4.3- (dream and real)
3. "Unninum, pasippinum" – 3.4.9- (eaten and hungry)
4. "Thaayum neeye, thandhai neeye" – 1.50.7 (mother and father)

- 5." Thaayaane thandhaiyumaagiya" -2.15.6 (mother and father)
6. "Viruththanaagi baalanaagi " -1.52.7 (Old and young)

2.2. Thirunavukkarasar Thevaram:

- 1." Appan nee ammai nee anbudaiya maamanum maamiyum nee "– 6.95.1. (he is mother, father, fatherin law, mother in law)
2. "Vinnura adukkuya viragin vevvazhal unniya pugi avai ondrum illaiyaam "– 4.11.3 (the smoke which comes out of the fire on the wooden rugs stacked upto the sky was zero or empty)
3." Thaayummai enakke thalaikkannumaai" -5.85.4 (He is mother and first son)

2.3. Sundarar Thevaram :

- 1." Ponnum meipporulum, bogamum thiruvum" -7.59.1 (gold and unseen truth)
2." Inna thanmaiyan endrari onnaa , eli vanda piraanai "7.59.1 (un understandable and always easy to feel)
3."vaazhaangiruppeer,vaazhndhu podhire"- 7.95.1. (who lives not and lived)
4." Oonaai,uyir aanaai,udal aanaai,ulagu aanaai vaanaai, nilan aanaai,kadal aanaimalai aanaai"-7.1.7
(he is flesh,soul, body,world,land, ocean,mountain)

3.Oxymorons in Thiruvvasagam

Manickavasagar uses oxymorons to convey the complexities of divine love, spiritual realization, and the ineffable qualities of Lord Shiva. These contradictory expressions help to illustrate the transcendent and mysterious aspects of the divine, which often defy ordinary logic

Verses of Sivapuranam in Thiruvvasagam shows many Oxymoronic terms

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1.Egan anegan | -5 th line (one and all) |
| 2.Veyyaai thaniyaayi | - 36 th line (heat and cold) |
| 3.Seyaayi naniyaane | - 44 th line (far away and near) |
| 4.Inbamum thunbamum | -70 th line (joy and sorrow) |
| 5.Illaane ullaane - line | -70 th line (he has all and nothing) |
| 6.Yaavaiyumaai allaiyumaai | -71 th line (every thing and nothing) |
| 7.Sodhiyane thunnirule | - 72. th line (Bright light and darkness gathered) |
| 8.Nokkariya nokke nunukkariya nunnunarve
scrutinize) | -76 th line (hard to be eyed and subtle) understanding , none can |
| 9.Pokkum varavum punarvumilla | -77 th line (who comes not ,nor goest, nor mingling with) |
| 10.Thotra sudaroliyaai sollaadha nunnunarvaa | - 80 th line (light of all passing splenders ,unutterablysubtle intellect) |
| 11.Poi kettu mei | - 86 th line (false and truth) |

12." manakkurai illai Thieukkraikkindravne "

"The one who has no wants, yet He diminishes all wants. Here, Lord Shiva is described as someone who has no desires or deficiencies.

13. " kallamum, karppum"

"The deceitful one, yet the chaste one."Shiva is referred to as " kallam " (deceitful or playful) and "karpu" (chaste or pure). This oxymoron captures the dual nature of Shiva.

14." Thaayum, thandhaiyumaai nirpaar "

"He stands as both mother and father, yet He is also the beloved lord of the lotus-like devotees." This phrase illustrates the paradoxical nature of Shiva being both nurturing like a mother and authoritative like a father.

15." Karuththavan, Kariyavan "

"The dark one, the black one, the one with the skull."The terms " Karuththavan" (dark) and " kariyavan" (black) are oxymoronic in the context of their symbolic meanings—darkness can represent ignorance or mystery, while blackness often symbolizes depth, the unknown, or the absolute.

5. Oxymorons in Thiruvsaippa:

It is constructed by many Authors Two examples are given for oxymoron in Thiruvsaippa. The first one speaks about (Siththam) memory cannot felt or sense the sweetness of honey, only tongue can sense, this oxymoronic term is coined and explained by Thirumaaligai thevar. Sendhanar says Siva is like karpaga kani which is a fruit in heaven and he is like Ruby Mountain though Ruby which is inside the mountain in the form of Ore cannot be seen by all.

- 1.Siththathul thiththikkum thene – Thirumaaligai thevar -1
2. Kattravar vizhungum karpagak kaniyai
matravar ariya maanikkamalaiyai – Sendhanaar-1

6. Oxymorons in Thirumandiram

In Thirumandiram, oxymorons are used to express the paradoxical nature of the divine and the mysteries of spiritual experience. Thirumoolar's use of oxymorons helps to capture the ineffable qualities of God, the universe, and the soul, which often transcend ordinary human understanding.

1. "Udalindri ullaththarul udalaaga nirkindran"

"He who exists without a body yet stands as a body." This oxymoron highlights the paradox of God being formless yet manifesting in physical form. It reflects the idea that the divine is both immanent in the physical world and transcendent beyond it.

2. "Arukkun mel aani vaiththaar pola"

"Like placing a jewel upon the sun." This phrase uses the contradiction between the brilliance of the sun and the beauty of a jewel.

3. "Meipporul poipporulkaai vilaindhidum"

"The true essence manifests as falsehood." This oxymoron conveys the idea that what appears as illusion in the material world is, in fact, a manifestation of the ultimate reality or truth.

4. "Neruppinul neer vaiththaar pola"

"Like placing water within fire." This phrase creates a paradox by juxtaposing two elements that are naturally opposed, symbolizing the coexistence of opposites within the divine or within spiritual practice.

5. "Kallaai nindra kaadhalan"

"Receiving the beloved who stands as a stone." This oxymoron describes the divine as being immovable and seemingly inert like a stone, yet full of love and life, capturing the tension between the apparent and the real in spiritual experience.

7. Oxymorons in Periyapuranam:

This work is known for its profound spiritual insights, deep philosophical teachings, and the use of poetic devices, including oxymorons, to convey complex ideas about life, divinity, and the cosmos. In Periyapuranam Sekkizhar speaks about Sivan as aadhi (the first one) nadu (continuation in middle) and prolonged life without any specific time. And he is like bright light can be viewed and unseen feelings (unarvu) and also male and female.

1. Aadhiyaai naduvumaagi alavilaa alavummagi

sodhiyaai unarvummagi,

Pennumaai aanummagi- (12.2.1)

2. karpanai kadandha sodhi karunaiye uruvamaagi-(12.2.2.) Here he says in the first portion Siva is like bright light beyond imagination but it can be seen by eyes of human, karunaiye uruvamaagi the next portion (karunai) God's Grace cannot be seen but it is mentioned as figure (uruvam) This can be referred as oxymoron

8. Oxymorons in Thiruppugazh:

In this thiruppugazh he says Murugan is Hari (Vishnu), Haran (Sivan) and (Iyan) Bramma

"Ayanena vaagi ariyena vaagi

ayanenavaagi avarmelaai" – Pazhamudhirsolai Thiruppugzh

9. Oxymorons in Thiruvilaiyadar Puranam:

1. kizhavanaagip pin kaalaiyaai – 1427 (old and young)

2. Periyaai siriyaai - 1482 (big and small)

3. Pazhaiyaai pudhiyaai - 1484 (Old and new)

4. Irulaai veliyaai - 1487 (dark and bright)

5. Inbamo siriyaadhaagum

thunbamo karaiyillaa kadal - 1540 (Joy and sorrow)

10. Oxymorons in Thiru Arutpa:

Ramalinga adigalar says he is mother and father for the whole universe.

"Thaayaagi thandhaiyumaai thaangukindra deivam" - Arutpa (mother and father)

11. Oxymorons in Barathiyar song:

"Senthamizh naadennum podhinile – inba

Thenvandhu paayudhu kaadhinile "

The great patriotic poet Subramania Barathiyar says that just uttering the word Tamilnadu makes him feel the sweet sense of honey. but he says honey was poured into his ears not in his mouth this is oxymoronic in meaning.

12. Oxymorons in Barathidasan song:

Barathidasan says thunbam (sorrow) and inbam (joy) in the same line. The music of yaazh will increase the joy by decreasing sorrow.

“ Thunbam nergaiyil yaazh eduththu nee
Inbam serkka maattaayaa “

13. Oxymorons in the Divya Prabandham:

Oxymorons in the Divya Prabandham are used to convey the ineffable qualities of Lord Vishnu, the intricacies of devotion, and the dualities that exist within the spiritual journey. These contradictory expressions help to highlight the divine mysteries and the profound emotions experienced by the Alvars. Oxymorons are used in these hymns to express the complex and often paradoxical nature of divine love, the relationship between the devotee and the divine, and the mysteries of spiritual experiences.

1. Nammalvar's Thiruvaymozhi:

" Kallam illaa malar magal nanni”

:"He who resides with the deceitless Lakshmi." The term " Kallamillaa" (deceitless) paired with " kallam" (deceit) in its implied sense can be seen as an oxymoron. He is associated with Lakshmi, who is pure and without deceit.

2. Andal's paasuram:

" Vaadinen vaadi varundhinen manam pudhuththizhaai aalaiyirukkum mayan”

"I wilted, I suffered, thinking of Him, the dark one who dwells with fresh tulasi garlands." The contrast between "wilted" and "fresh" within the same context creates a paradox

3. Periyalvar's Periyalvar Tirumoli:

" Aazhi neerezhumaruginil varaak kandavaare”

"One who lies in the deep ocean and yet is as close as the eyelid. "The contradiction between the vastness of the ocean and the intimacy of the eyelid creates an oxymoron that reflects the dual nature of the divine—both distant and infinitely close, unreachable yet intimately present.

4. Thirumangai Alvar's Periya Tirumozhi:

" Moodanaai nindraan murugaai nindraan”

He stood as an immovable one, yet as a tender one. "The terms " moodanaai” (immovable or obstinate) and " murugaai" (tender or soft) form an oxymoron that highlights the paradoxical nature of the Lord, who is both stern and gentle, unyielding and compassionate.

5. Kulasekara Alvar's Perumal Tirumozhi:

" Pirappinil Pirappare “

"The birth within births." This oxymoron expresses the divine paradox of Lord Vishnu, who is born as an avatar (taking a physical birth) yet remains unbound by the cycle of birth and death, representing the birth of eternal truth within the temporal world.

Oxymorons in different languages

Oxymorons are a universal literary device found across many languages, used to capture the complexities of human experience, the paradoxes of life, and the mysteries of the divine. Oxymorons are used in literature across many languages to express complex ideas, emotions, and the paradoxical nature of reality.

1. English

- **Bittersweet:** Combines "bitter" (painful or unpleasant) with "sweet" (pleasant), often used to describe a mixed emotion or experience that is both painful and pleasant at the same time.
- **Deafening silence:** Combines "deafening" (extremely loud) with "silence" (absence of sound), often used to describe a situation where the silence is so profound that it feels overwhelmingly loud.
- **Living dead:** Refers to someone who is biologically alive but emotionally or spiritually dead, or to zombies in popular culture.

2. Spanish

- **Cálido frío:** Literally "warm cold," used to describe something that feels both warm and cold simultaneously, often in an emotional or sensory context.
- **Agri dulce:** Similar to "bittersweet" in English, it combines "agrio" (sour) with "dulce" (sweet) to describe a taste or an experience that is both sour and sweet.

- **Silencio ensordecedor:** Translates to "deafening silence," used in a similar context to describe a silence that is overwhelming in its intensity.

3. French

- **Obscure clarté:** Literally "obscure clarity," often used to describe something that is clear yet mysterious or difficult to understand, conveying a sense of paradox.
- **Douleur exquise:** Translates to "exquisite pain," used to describe a particularly intense and bittersweet emotional pain, often in the context of unrequited love.
- **Cri silencieux:** "Silent scream," used to describe an intense feeling of distress or anguish that is not outwardly expressed.

4. German

- **Furchtbar schön:** Literally "terribly beautiful," an oxymoron used to describe something that is awe-inspiringly beautiful yet terrifying or overwhelming.
- **Schrecklich nett:** Translates to "terribly nice," often used ironically to describe someone who is overly nice in a way that feels insincere or annoying.
- **Lebendiger Tod:** "Living death," similar to the English "living dead," used to describe a state of being where one is physically alive but devoid of spirit or vitality.

5. Italian

- **Dolce amaro:** "Bittersweet," used to describe a taste or an emotional experience that has both pleasant and unpleasant elements.
- **Gelo caldo:** Literally "cold heat," used to describe an emotion or situation that has conflicting elements of warmth and coldness.
- **Silenzio assordante:** "Deafening silence," used to convey a silence that is so profound it feels overwhelming, similar to its use in English.

6. Japanese

- **苦い甘さ (Nigai amasa):** "Bitter sweetness," used to describe an experience that is both bitter and sweet, often in an emotional context.
- **静かな騒ぎ (Shizukana sawagi):** "Quiet noise," used to describe a situation where there is a lot of underlying tension or activity that is not outwardly visible.
- **生きた死体 (Ikita shitai):** "Living corpse," similar to "living dead," used to describe someone who is physically alive but emotionally or spiritually dead.

7. Chinese (Mandarin)

- **痛快 (Tòngkuài):** Literally "painful pleasure," an oxymoron used to describe something that is both painful and pleasurable, often in the context of a bittersweet experience.
- **含蓄的表白 (Hánxù de biǎobái):** "Implicit confession," combining the idea of being both explicit and implicit, often used to describe a situation where someone reveals their feelings indirectly.
- **无声的叫喊 (Wúshēng de jiàohǎn):** "Silent scream," used to describe an intense emotional experience that is not outwardly expressed.

8. Russian

- **Живой труп (Zhivoy trup):** "Living corpse," similar to the English "living dead," used to describe someone who is physically alive but spiritually or emotionally dead.
- **Горькая радость (Gorkaya radost):** "Bitter joy," used to describe an experience that is joyful yet tinged with sadness or bitterness.
- **Оглушительная тишина (Oglushitelnaya tishina):** "Deafening silence," used in the same way as in English, to describe an overwhelming silence.

9. Arabic

- **صمت صاخب (Samit sakhib):** "Loud silence," used to describe a silence that feels overwhelming or intense.
- **مر حلو (Murr hulw):** "Bitter sweet," used to describe an experience or taste that has both bitter and sweet elements.
- **ميت حي (Mayyit hay):** "Living dead," used to describe someone who is physically alive but emotionally or spiritually dead.

Conclusion:

Oxymorons in Tamil literature is not just a stylistic choice but a reflection of the culture's deep engagement with the complexities of life. They enrich the language by adding layers of meaning, making the expressions more vivid, profound, and resonant. The use of oxymorons highlights the beauty of the Tamil language, showcasing its ability to convey nuanced emotions and philosophical ideas with elegance and depth. These contradictions help to illustrate the unity of opposites and the deeper truths of non-dualism, making devotional text not just a text of spiritual instruction but also a work of great poetic beauty and philosophical depth. The use of oxymorons in the hymns adds to the poetic beauty and spiritual resonance of the texts, making it a timeless work of Tamil devotional literature

In **Thiruvagasam**, oxymorons are not just stylistic devices but are integral to expressing the mystical and paradoxical nature of the divine. These oxymorons add layers of meaning, making Thiruvagasam a masterpiece of Tamil devotional literature

In **Thirumandiram**, oxymorons are a powerful literary and spiritual tool used by Thirumoolar to express the profound and often paradoxical nature of the divine and the universe. Through the use of oxymorons, Thirumoolar conveys that the ultimate reality transcends all dualities, leading the seeker towards a higher understanding of the divine.

In the **Divya Prabandham**, oxymorons serve as a powerful literary device that allows the Alvars to articulate the profound and often paradoxical nature of their divine experiences. These expressions encapsulate the complexities of devotion, the mysterious qualities of Lord Vishnu, and the philosophical depth of Vaishnavism.

Oxymorons are a universal literary device found across many languages, used to capture the complexities of human experience, the paradoxes of life, and the mysteries of the divine. Whether in expressing love, sorrow, joy, or spiritual truths, oxymorons enrich language by conveying meaning that goes beyond the literal, inviting readers and listeners to explore deeper layers of thought and feeling.

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