

Article

Kiran Prasad Goda

Water as a Motif: A Thematic Analysis of *Eeram* (2009)



Abstract

The water is a central motif throughout the movie, it articulates the psychological and moral tensions till the end. A Tamil Horror/Mystery directed by Arivazhagan Venkatachalam in 2009 and produced by S. Shankar and Music by Thaman S. The director employs water as a motif throughout the film, using it consistently to convey deeper meanings and enhance the narrative. Water is not merely a visual or an atmospheric element but it's a deeply embedded symbolic device which is used in narrative to explain the character development, mood, creating emotional and intellectual depth of the movie *Eeram*.

Keywords

Eeram, Water motif, Tamil cinema, symbolism, cinematography, supernatural thriller, thematic analysis, visual cue.

Introduction

Eeram (2009) a Tamil Horror/Mystery taking water as a motif and travels throughout the movie with a focus to share a perfect narrative. Water, with its fluid transformative and symbolic nature has been one of cinema's

most enduring motifs. Director Arivazhagan *Eeram* (2009) movie allows characters and plotlines in an interactive way which reveals deeper human experience and evokes a particular feeling or memory beyond dialogue. Water as a motif and narrative agent

the director uses in every frame sets the mood for the audience and they travel with the emotion. Example Vasudevan is a cop and former lover he always gets a clue in a visual pattern. Director Arivazhagan Venkatachalam and producer S. Shankar and Music director Thaman S have joined hands and gave a psychological drama with supernatural thriller. The article analyzes how water as a motif in *Eeram* to underscore its core themes like life, death, memory, unresolved trauma and Breakdown of societal order.

Symbol, Symbolism and Motif

In *Sigappu Rojakkal* a rose flower used as a symbol represents love and death. It can also be an object, image, character or element that represents an idea, concept and theme. Symbolism is like conveying deep meaning and emotions using symbols in a narrative the way it is shown in the movie called *Sigappu Rojakkal*. In *Sigappu Rojakkal* Character Dileep is given a rose daily by his gardener that gives deep meaning and emotions. A motif is a repeated element or recurring symbolic element or pattern which travels throughout the narrative.

Why Water Works as A Cinematic Motif

Water is inherently versatile. It can be calm or violent, life-giving or destructive, visible or invisible. Filmmakers use it to project emotions, mystery and transformation onto it because it flows, seeps and takes shape based on its environment. In *Eeram* where Ramya uses water as a symbol of life, memory, emotions and trauma to the wrong people into the present and the director uses water as a motif to convey the narrative.

Life, Death and Memory

Life - Water as Vitality and Emotional Connection

Water as a motif and life giving element gives the emotional connections and love once shared between Vasudevan and Ramya. Romantic scenes are well constructed by the director Arivazhagan. The rain is shown as a shared joy, symbolizing emotional freshness and vitality of love. In flashbacks, rain often frames their tender moments, showing water as a source of emotional warmth. This makes the later transformation of water into a haunting presence and more impactful.

Death - Haunting and Justice

The same element that nurtures life also becomes tied to ramya's murder and her ghostly presence because water surrounds her murder and her ghostly appearances makes it a symbol. Moments linked to her death, turning it into a reminder of mortality.

Memory - Past and Present

Water's reflective and lingering nature mirrors memories, especially painful ones. For Vasudevan it triggers love, regret and what if ramya is murdered. Dripping taps, damp walls, fogged glass and rainstorms act like physical reminders of the past that cannot be forgotten.

The interconnection of life, death and memory in *Eeram* are inseparable. All are connected and expressed through water.

Life - flowing and emotional connection.

Death - haunting and justice.

Memory - past and present.

By using water in these layered ways, *Eeram* turns a simple visual motif created by the director Arivazhagan.

Water as an Atmospheric Device

Director Arivazhagan in *Eeram* (2009) has meticulously crafted every aspect of the film to ensure it remains deeply engaging and connected to the audience. In the area of sound design to enhance the mood of the film, the dripping of taps, splashing of rain and echo of water drop in closed rooms works as auditory cues. These sounds built tension and anticipation, making viewers feel that something unresolved is seeping into the present. In the Romance to Horror travel the water shift is shown very beautifully. In flashbacks, warm rain creates an intimate, romantic glow between Vasudevan and Ramya. In the present, the same rain turns cold and dark, signaling danger or the ghost's presence. As the narrative progresses, the water imagery becomes more frequent and aggressive. Early on, it's limited to external rain and minor leaks, but towards the climax, it fills indoor spaces entirely making the audience feel submerged in Ramya's unresolved story. This transformation of atmosphere mirrors the narrative's tonal shift from love story to supernatural thriller. By using similar water imagery in both past and present timelines, the film visually fuses them, making transitions seamless and reinforcing the idea that the past is constantly bleeding into the present. *Eeram* makes the audience occupy a world where atmosphere is inseparable from narrative, a space where the

air always feels heavy with memory, grief and the supernatural.

Water as a Motif: How It Operates in *Eeram* and Other Movies

In *Eeram* taking water as a motif, the director conveys emotional, psychological and moral themes especially trauma, guilt and justice without dialogue. Water is used not just as atmosphere, but as a main motif that interacts in every frame. As previously mentioned, water is used as a powerful symbol. It functions on many levels like life, death, memory, and a medium for supernatural presence, a metaphor for emotions and trauma and as a visual cue. Arivazhagan's *Eeram* (2009) stands out as a strong example of how water can function not just as a visual element, but as an active narrative and emotional device.

SUPERNATURAL PRESENCE



In *Eeram* (2009) Supernatural Presence, Emotions and Trauma, Visual Cue

In this movie water is not associated with the ghost, it is a form of voice and method of action. In other horror films the spirit is announced through traditional sudden noises, shadows and sudden jump scares. In this her

presence is built slowly using leaking taps, dripping ceilings and moisture through windows.

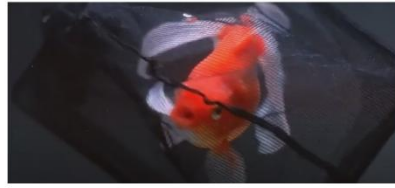
Water becomes the medium and is connected to Ramya's emotional state. Especially her pain, betrayal and desire for justice. Her presence is never directly shown initially. Ramya's

emotions are powerfully conveyed in a scene where Vasudevan, a cop and her former lover, is devastated by her death. He believes it wasn't a suicide and refuses to accept the way society portrays her. The impact of visual effects (VFX) and Computer-Generated imagery (CGI) on narrative through visuals makes the scene more emotional. Ramya's tear-streaked face appears behind the window glass, creating a deeply moving visual. Mirrors and reflections are used cleverly to provide hidden truth and emotions. Water becomes Ramya's symbol of memory, emotion, justice and transformation.

Visual Cue

Masterclass storytelling by director Arivazhagan Venkatachalam where visual cues play a central role in communicating emotions, building suspense and guiding the audience through psychological and supernatural dimensions in the film. In the Interval scene we come to know it's a ghost revenge movie until the incidents which are happening will be looking like accidents and cops will be clueless.

VISUAL CUE



VISUAL CUE
(RAMYA MANIFEST HERSELF INTO THE CHILD AND THANKING VASUDEVAN)



Water as a Persistent Visual Cue & Color Cue

Water appears as the core motif in every frame not just as a background element but as a visual cue the director shows the presence of ghosts, emotional memory or approaching danger through leaking taps, overflowing sinks, moisture glass windows. The director conveys rain in the movie to convey emotional weight like flashbacks of Ramya and Vasudevan past love.

Color Cue (Symbolic use of Red) - Red as a Narrative Accent

The color red, it is a visual cue seeded throughout the film. The red color used by Ramya as a subtle symbol, serves as a clue for Vasudevan but only in later stages he recognizes it but the director shows these symbols in the whole movie.

The Color palette used by the cinematographer adopts a cool, desaturated palette giving the entire more a wet and somber tone.

Emotions and Trauma

As it's the core Emotion and trauma story of unresolved emotions and buried trauma, for both personal and collective. Water appears as rain, damp walls and ceilings, leaking taps, moisture glass and windows. This symbolizes sadness, emotional heaviness, hidden trauma faced by Vasudevan and Ramya, their past love life and Vasudevan regret over losing Ramya. Guilt as a parallel trauma Vasudevan's trauma is not just about losing Ramya it's also rooted in this guilt over failing to protect her when she needed him the most. His silence and inability to act in the past turn into a heavy emotional burden, making every scene he investigates feel like a personal reckoning. Ramya's abusive marriage and being murdered. Leaking taps, moisture glass and windows are being used as a revenge, visual cue, emotions and for justice by Ramya. The cinematographer Manoj Paramahansa used Wide shots during rain scenes to evoke loneliness or sadness, especially around Vasudevan. Director Arivazhagan forms the film's visual design in Vasudevan grief and Ramya's silent suffering as the emotional backbone of the film. Ramya's marriage, which should have offered security but Her husband's controlling nature and the emotional neglect she suffers the trauma of living in a toxic relationship. She becomes emotional, suffocating and abusive and makes herself isolated from everyone until her tragic murder. Collective emotional blindness, the film doesn't only focus on individual grief it shows how society as a whole often chooses to ignore or downplay signs of abuse and injustice. Neighbors, friends and even institutions fail to recognize Ramya's suffering. To demand justice and

seek revenge against the people for her tragic death, Ramya allows her spirit to communicate with watery visuals and also to convey the truth and to thank, save Vasudevan she manifests through people compelling them to reveal the truth. Emotions and trauma are not just plot points, they are deeply embedded in the atmosphere, visuals and character arcs, making the film a layered exploration.

Unresolved Trauma

In *Eeram*, Unresolved trauma is the emotional engine that drives both the living and the dead. For Vasudevan it's the regret of losing Ramya due to misunderstandings and societal pressure, coupled with guilt over failing to protect her. His trauma continues longer and deep in every investigation scene, shown through his expressions, silence and repeated encounters with water-linked imagery. Vasudevan's friend literally says there is no clue in these incidents happening and your connecting everything to Ramya's death is literally a foolish thing. Vasudevan bursts out and says he regrets losing Ramya due to misunderstandings and societal pressure and i know her and i still love her I don't believe these reports against her. Ramya's tear-streaked face appears behind the window glass creating a deeply moving visual. For ramya, her trauma is twofold enduring an abusive marriage where her voice was silenced and suffering a violent death that was misrepresented as a suicide makes Ramya to take revenge and use water as a symbol. The film visualizes this continued pain through constant dampness leaking taps, water stained walls, fogged glass giving the sense that emotions have soaked into the environment

and cannot be dried out until the trauma is solved by both the living and the dead. This unhealed wound is what makes the ghost's return, the haunting itself becomes a metaphor for how unresolved trauma refuses to stay buried until truth and justice are achieved.

Water as A Motif: How It Operates In Eeram and Other Movies

Other Movies

Thanneer Thanneer (1981) : Directed by K. Balachander

Has a core motif of water scarcity. The lack of water is not just about thirst, it's a metaphor for government neglect and social injustice. The whole movie is about the villagers fighting for their basic right to water.

Karnan (2021) : Directed by Mari Selvaraj

In the Karnan movie the donkey tied to the post is a symbol of oppression and in the same movie the horse that's running is a motif because it's recurring. The horse appears throughout the film in various forms such as the horse riding statue, the hero riding a horse and even the horse riding policeman. This repeated imagery doesn't just represent one thing it reinforces the film's central theme of power and struggle for freedom. The horse symbolizes authority and strength, and its presence in different contexts highlights the evolving power dynamics between the villagers and their oppressors. The donkey is a single powerful symbol while the horse is a repeated motif that develops the film's core ideas.

Breakdown of Societal Order

The story also uses water to reflect the cracks in social and moral structures. Ramya's death is the central tragedy of *Eeram*, but the case handling by the police exposes a flaw without deeper investigation, especially when the victim is a woman. When her body found and the police without proper investigation and hard evidence, they come to a conclusion that its a suicide with the assumptions rooted in societal bias. Her status as a married woman and she facing emotional difficulties are often stereotyped as she is emotionally weak or unstable, coupled with community gossip making the suicide as a convenient explanation and this assumption towards the case pass without serious challenge. This is more than just a plot device, it reflects in the real world that without proper investigation in domestic spaces women's deaths are often dismissed without proper forensic or psychological investigation. The gender bias by the police and community people gossip that leads to neglect the crucial evidence in the initial enquiry in the film that also ties to social prejudice. Gossip and prejudice shape public perception of ramya after her death, reflecting how social reputation often outweighs truth in the community.

Justice requires Persistence

Vasudevan as a cop and former lover his refusal to accept the suicide narrative giving by his own department and the apartment members his deeper investigation through the case becomes success. Vasudevan initially believes Ramya's husband is confessing his crime, but in reality, Ramya has possessed him, forcing him to reveal the truth before the press. His altered behavior makes it clear to

Vasudevan that confession is driven by Ramya's presence, not genuine remorse. As an institutional failure by the law enforcement, marriage as a failed protective institution in *Eeram* particularly for Ramya. The institution that is supposed to safeguard her instead becomes emotional abuse, controlling and eventual murder. From giving security to placing a trap to her husband's emotional control over her, limiting her freedom and silencing her voice. Marriage always gives mutual support and stability especially traditionally marriage is a protective social contract. In Ramya's case, it functions as a trap. From personal relationships to law enforcement water becomes a quiet but relentless force eroding these corrupt systems. By the end, water's presence creates the destruction of these false

social facades, making space for justice and moral restoration.

Conclusion

In *Eeram*, water is more than an atmospheric tool, it is the core motif through which film's themes are explored and expressed. The success of *Eeram* (2009) lies not just in its plot, but in how it tells the story visually. Every drop of water, every fogged mirror, and every color choice adds another layered tale of emotion, justice and supernatural vengeance. Director Arivazhagan and team use visual cues not only to scare but to communicate, engaging the viewer in a deeper, almost subconscious level. These cues make *Eeram* not just a supernatural thriller, but a richly textured cinematic experience.

Reference:

1. The Impact of Visual Effects (VFX) and Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) on Narrative Immersion in Eega - <https://fipresci-india.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/4.-Art.-Kiran-Prasad-G-VFX.pdf>
2. <https://youtu.be/RwzfXMs5WtM?si=jIU5U-nDh8YYNUaR>

Kiran Prasad Goda is an Instructor, Loyola College Chennai, visual communication educator passionate about media, design, and storytelling.