

Visual Discourse on Disability: Deciphering Nadigar Thilagam Shivaji Ganesan's Deiva Magan (1969) and Baaga Pirivinai (1959)

The portrayals of disability in visual media have a profound and lasting impact on spectators, often shaping public perception in ways that lead to the unnecessary and illogical construction of stereotypes and social stigma. Such representations do not remain confined to the screen; instead, they permeate everyday life, influencing how disabled individuals are viewed, treated, and positioned within society. When disability is repeatedly depicted through lenses of pity, abnormality, or moral deficiency, these portrayals contribute to the creation of an inhospitable social environment that marginalizes disabled people and renders them vulnerable to mistreatment, exclusion, and constant relegation from the mainstream of social life. Cinema, as a powerful visual and cultural medium, thus plays a critical role in either reinforcing or challenging these entrenched attitudes. Building on a foundational understanding of disability representations, this research paper seeks to interrogate the visual discourse surrounding disability in two significant Tamil films featuring Nadigar Thilagam Shivaji Ganesan: *Deiva Magan* (1969) and *Baaga Pirivinai* (1959). These films offer contrasting yet complementary narratives through which disability is constructed and communicated to the audience. *Deiva Magan* foregrounds the emotional and social trials faced by a father and son who share a facial deformity, emphasizing the ways in which societal attitudes, prejudice, and exclusion exacerbate their suffering. Rather than focusing solely on physical difference, the film exposes how social responses to deformity generate pain, alienation, and conflict, thereby revealing disability as a socially mediated experience. In contrast, *Baaga Pirivinai* explores the life of a character whose disability results from an accident during his teenage years, drawing attention to themes of loss, adaptation, and altered social roles.

Together, these two cinematic works provide a rich discursive field for analyzing the portrayal of disability in Tamil cinema of the mid-twentieth century. By presenting different origins and experiences of disability—congenital deformity in *Deiva Magan* and acquired impairment in *Baaga Pirivinai*—the films enable a nuanced examination of how visual narratives construct meaning around disabled bodies. To ensure a coherent and systematic analysis, the paper adopts the fundamental tenets and dynamic perspectives of Critical Disability Studies. This theoretical framework allows the study to move beyond medicalized or purely emotional readings of disability and instead focus on the power relations, cultural norms, and ideological structures that shape representation.