



Magalir Vidiyal Payanam - Framework And Literature Review

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ABSTRACT Tamil Nadu introduced the **Magalir Vidiyal Payanam (fare-free bus travel) scheme** in 2021, providing women with free travel in ordinary government-operated city and town buses. The scheme was designed not merely as a transport subsidy but as a social-welfare and gender-equity intervention intended to reduce women's mobility costs, improve access to employment and essential services, and strengthen their economic independence. This chapter presents the framework, impact and literature review of Magalir vidiyal payanam. Evidence from government budget documents and independent studies indicates that this programme has substantially increased women's bus usage and reduced household transportation expenditure. However, challenges concerning bus capacity, service frequency, infrastructure, financial sustainability and the quality of implementation remain important. Overall, the scheme represents a significant experiment in gender-responsive public transport policy, but its long-term success depends on improving service quality alongside maintaining fare support.

Keywords: Magalir Vidiyal Payanam, Framework, Impact, Literature Review.

INTRODUCTION

Public transport plays an important role in improving social and economic opportunities, particularly for people who cannot afford private vehicles. For women, transportation costs can become an important barrier to employment, education, healthcare, shopping, and other essential activities. These barriers are especially significant for women from low-income households and those working in the informal sector. Recognising the importance of mobility in women's economic and social participation, the Government of Tamil Nadu introduced the **Magalir Vidiyal Payanam** scheme in 2021. From the date of August 24, 2026, CM Vijay announced in assembly that Magalir vidiyal payanam will be expanded and rebranded as '**Vettri Payanam**' and it was implemented from October 2, 2026, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The programme provides free travel to women in eligible government buses. Unlike a general reduction in bus fares, the policy specifically targets women and attempts to address gender differences in mobility and access to public transport.

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to present the theoretical framework and literature review of Magalir Vidiyal Payanam scheme for women in Tamil Nadu.

FRAMEWORK OF THE SCHEME

The Government of Tamil Nadu introduced the Magalir Vidiyal Payanam Scheme in May 2021 with the objective of providing fare-free travel facilities to women in eligible ordinary government-operated city and town buses. The scheme is intended to reduce women's commuting expenditure, improve mobility, and facilitate their access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin has characterized the initiative as an economic transformation rather than merely a welfare benefit, emphasizing its contribution to household savings and women's economic participation. The Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (TNSTC) is a government-owned public transportation organization responsible for operating intercity and town bus services across Tamil Nadu and connecting the state with neighbouring states. The Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) operates public bus services in Chennai. Under the Scheme, women can travel without paying fares on designated ordinary services, commonly identified by their white destination boards. These buses generally operate on regular routes and stop at designated bus stops. The government provides financial assistance to state transport undertakings to compensate for the revenue loss arising from the implementation of the scheme. The initiative can be understood as more than a transportation subsidy, as it represents an intervention aimed at promoting gender equality, social inclusion, and economic independence. In India, women's participation in paid employment is influenced by several socioeconomic and cultural factors, including educational limitations, household

responsibilities, unequal access to transportation, and financial dependence. These challenges are particularly significant among women belonging to economically disadvantaged communities, many of whom are engaged in low-paid or informal employment. In several households, access to private transportation is disproportionately available to male members, while women depend primarily on public transport for commuting and fulfilling domestic responsibilities. In this context, affordable and accessible public transportation plays a significant role in expanding women's mobility and employment opportunities. The removal of travel expenses can reduce the financial burden on working women, encourage participation in economic activities, and improve access to essential services. Even women who are not engaged in paid employment may benefit from the scheme through reduced expenditure on household-related travel, healthcare visits, education, shopping, and social activities. Although the scheme has been described by its proponents as an important economic and social initiative, discussions surrounding fare-free transportation have also raised questions regarding its financial sustainability, implementation and long-term benefits. The effectiveness of such a programme should be assessed not only in terms of the number of beneficiaries but also through its influence on travel behaviour, household expenditure, employment accessibility, user satisfaction and overall quality of life. Under Vettri payanam scheme free travel is allowed in express buses, LSS, Deluxe buses, Ordinary Mofussil buses for inter- district travel and Ordinary Ghat buses even beyond 40km.

FEATURES

The fare-free benefit primarily applies to ordinary/white-board government buses. Ordinary buses constitute an important component of the public transport network because they serve numerous stops and connect residential areas with workplaces, markets and other destinations. The scheme is implemented through Tamil Nadu's State Transport Undertakings, with the government compensating the undertakings for revenue foregone because of free travel. The scale of government support is substantial. In the **Government of Tamil Nadu(2024) Budget Speech 2024–25 estimates, ₹3,050 crore for free bus travel for women**, alongside **₹1,521 crore for student concessions** and **₹1,800 crore for diesel subsidy**. This financial arrangement is important because the transport corporations continue to provide the service while the government bears a significant part of the cost associated with the concession.

IMPACT OF WOMENS MOBILITY

One of the clearest outcomes of the scheme has been increased use of public buses by women. The government reported that the share of women passengers increased substantially following implementation; an early budget document 2022-2023 recorded an increase from 40% to 61%. Independent evidence also supports the conclusion that the scheme changed travel behaviour. **Narayanan, S. (2024) Citizen Consumer and civic Action Group (CAG)** surveyed that **2659 of the 3,000 women respondents across six Tamil Nadu cities** found that the majority reported changes in their travel patterns after the introduction of the scheme. Many women reported using buses more frequently because they no longer had to weigh the cost of a bus trip against walking or using other modes. The increase in mobility has implications beyond transportation. Greater mobility can improve women's ability to seek employment, attend educational institutions, access healthcare, participate in social activities and manage household responsibilities.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

The financial benefit is one of the most important features of the programme. CAG's study found that women saved approximately **₹601–₹800 per month** on average as a result of the fare-free service. The earlier study also found that much of the money saved was redirected towards household needs. The government's 2025 address reported an even higher estimated average household saving of **₹888 per month**. These savings can be particularly meaningful for low-income households. A relatively small reduction in monthly transportation expenditure can free resources for food, education, healthcare and other essential household expenses. Thus, the scheme can be understood as an **indirect income-support measure**. Instead of transferring cash directly to women, the government reduces the cost of accessing public transport.

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Improving mobility can potentially increase women's access to employment. Women who previously avoided distant employment because of transportation costs may be more willing to travel when bus fares are removed. **Jilly Philippa Joel Premkumar, Sameem Banu and Meenal (2024)** examined women in Sivaganga district reported that this scheme improved economic and social aspects of women's lives, particularly among lower-income groups. Respondents associated the programme with increased mobility, access to economic resources and financial independence. The Tamil Nadu government has also linked the scheme to improvements in women's workforce participation, citing a State Planning Commission study.

SOCIAL AND GENDER IMPLICATIONS

The scheme has significance from a gender-equality perspective. Women's mobility is often constrained by household income, safety concerns, social norms and dependence on other family members for transportation. By removing the fare barrier, the government has effectively increased women's freedom to make short and frequent journeys. Such journeys may include taking children to school, visiting healthcare facilities, purchasing household necessities, attending government offices or travelling to workplaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT EFFECTS

Fare-free travel may also influence transport mode choice. CAG's research found that some women shifted from share autos, autos and two-wheelers towards public buses. This suggests a potential environmental benefit because greater use of shared public transport can reduce dependence on individual motorised vehicles. However, the environmental impact depends on the operational quality of the bus system. If free travel generates additional demand without adequate fleet expansion, overcrowding and service deterioration may occur. Therefore, fare policy should be accompanied by investment in bus capacity, fleet modernisation and route planning. Tamil Nadu has recognised the importance of fleet expansion. The 2024–25 Budget proposed procurement of **3,000 new buses and**

500 electric buses, partly to improve the capacity and quality of public transport and the 2025-26 budget includes plans for **1,125 electric buses in Chennai, Coimbatore and Madurai**.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sudarkodi and Balasubramani (2021) examined the free bus travel initiative from the perspective of women's welfare and empowerment. Their work highlighted that eliminating transportation costs could improve women's financial security and mobility, particularly among economically disadvantaged women. The authors viewed the initiative as an important welfare intervention capable of strengthening women's independence and access to employment and education.

Tamil Nadu State Planning Commission's studies (2022) provide important evidence on the economic and social effects of the Zero-Ticket Bus Travel Scheme. The studies reported that women beneficiaries experienced increased savings and mobility. Women in Chennai were reported to make frequent bus journeys and achieve substantial savings in monthly travel expenditure. The studies also indicated that the scheme particularly benefited women from Scheduled Caste, Backward Class and other economically disadvantaged households. The second phase of the study further associated the scheme with increased disposable income, employment engagement, reduced dependence on family members and improved opportunities for education and social participation.

Joel Premkumar, Banu and Meenal (2023) examined whether the free-bus policy for women contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The authors positioned women's mobility as an important determinant of economic independence, employment and poverty reduction. They argued that reducing transportation expenditure can particularly benefit daily-wage and low-income women. The study connects the Tamil Nadu intervention with SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and broader poverty-reduction objectives.

Balasingh N (2023) reviewed the Zero-Ticket Bus Travel Scheme in Chennai, focusing on its financial implications and women's perceptions of the service. The study considered the scheme as an intervention aimed at reducing women's dependence on paid transportation. It also examined safety perceptions among women passengers using Metropolitan Transport Corporation buses. This study is useful because it brings together the economic and safety dimensions of the scheme rather than concentrating only on free travel.

Rama Swamy (2023) investigated women's perceptions and problems relating to the Zero-Ticket Bus Scheme in Coimbatore. The research used primary data from 150 women passengers selected through purposive sampling. The study specifically examined overcrowding, delays, infrastructure deficiencies and other problems associated with bus travel after implementation of the scheme.

Manikandan.R, Sowmitha.K, Vidhya.N(2024) this study has investigated women passengers' socio economic condition and economic benefits through the Zero Ticket Bus Travel Scheme. In Coimbatore District, rural and urban free bus users were selected, and the Snowball sampling techniques were used for selected sample passengers. This study found that the ZTBTS scheme increases employment opportunities through women's mobility. More than 90 per cent of the passengers were working women. The women using this free bus regularly were saving almost Rs. 253 in a month and they spent that money on other purposes (i.e., Food, Cosmetics, travel). Women using this free bus have suggested improving the quality of the free bus, increasing the benefits for women's empowerment.

Joel Premkumar, SameemBanu and Meenal (2024) studied the economic and social impact of the free bus travel policy among women in Sivaganga district. Using a mixed-method approach involving 150 survey respondents and 30 qualitative interviews, the study found that the scheme had a positive impact, particularly among lower-income women. The respondents reported improvements in mobility, access to economic resources and financial independence. However, the study also identified operational problems, including inadequate bus frequency, infrastructure deficiencies and difficulties related to time management.

Muthusamy (2024) examined women's satisfaction with the free bus travel scheme in Madurai City. The study focused on women's perceptions of the scheme and the quality of the ordinary bus services covered by the programme. It noted that the scheme applies primarily to ordinary or "white-board" buses and highlighted the importance of examining passenger satisfaction in addition to the economic benefits of free travel.

Barkavi (2024) investigated the impact of the Tamil Nadu Free Bus Travel Scheme on women's workforce participation and economic empowerment in Cuddalore. The study reported positive effects on women's socioeconomic status and mobility and suggested that the reduction in commuting costs could improve women's access to employment and education. The study therefore connects the transport subsidy with broader objectives of women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

Jilly Philippa,Et.al. (2024) examined the scheme's impact in Sivaganga District, noting its role in enhancing mobility, financial independence, and access to economic resources for low-income women. Despite its benefits, issues such as poor time management, infrastructure gaps, and low frequency of buses were identified as challenges to effective implementation.

Sumana Narayanan The Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) (2024) conducted one of the larger independent assessments of the scheme, surveying 3,000 women across six cities in Tamil Nadu. The study found that a large majority of respondents had changed their travel patterns after the scheme's introduction and were using buses more frequently. Some women shifted from share autos, autos and two-wheelers to buses. CAG concluded that the scheme had clearly increased women's mobility, although its survey could not establish that the scheme alone caused women to enter the workforce. CAG's research also highlighted the economic dimension of the scheme. Women reported savings on transportation expenditure, and these savings were often directed towards household requirements such as health and education. This suggests that the scheme operates not only as a transport intervention but also as an indirect form of income support for low-income households.

Gomathi and Revathy (2024) on women's welfare under the Zero-Ticket Bus Travel Scheme in Coimbatore examined socioeconomic benefits, mobility and satisfaction among women passengers. The findings reported positive perceptions concerning women's mobility, empowerment, workforce participation and work-life balance, although respondents also indicated that further improvements were required. More recent research has continued to examine the scheme from women's empowerment and

socioeconomic development perspective. A 2025 study focusing on Namakkal district reported improvements in women's savings, participation in work and education, and household decision-making autonomy among beneficiaries. Similarly, research on unorganised-sector women in Salem reported increased mobility, financial autonomy, employment participation and social inclusion among beneficiaries.

Shriram, Mohammed Bilal and Rajesh (2025) examined the role and impact of several Tamil Nadu women's empowerment schemes, including free bus services, Kalaingar Magalir Urimai Thogai and the Moovalur Ramamirtham Ammaiyar Pudhumai Penn scheme. Their study is significant because it moves beyond examining the bus scheme in isolation and considers how different welfare interventions collectively influence women's access to education, healthcare, employment, mobility and economic independence.

Priyadharshini and Krishna Prasanth (2025) examined the impact of the Tamil Nadu Free Bus Scheme on women passengers in Coimbatore. The study reported improvements in mobility, reduction in transportation expenditure and increased independence. However, overcrowding, irregular schedules and safety concerns remained important challenges. The study therefore supports the argument that financial accessibility and physical accessibility must be considered together when evaluating the scheme.

Renugadevi. S, Sudharsan. G (2025) states that the Tamil Nadu's public transportation plays an important role in rendering mobility affordable and accessible, particularly for working women. The Zero Ticket Bus Travel Scheme introduced in 2021 has significantly impacted the labour force participation of women through reduced commuting costs and enhanced accessibility. This study explores working women's perception of the scheme in Coimbatore, with a focus on their satisfaction level, faced challenges, and socio-economic benefits. Based on extensive data analysis, this study explains the impact of the scheme on work, education, and health services and identifies areas of improvement.

Baladhandayutham and Palraj (2026) examined the socioeconomic impact of the MagalirVidiyalPayanam Scheme on women in the unorganised sector in Salem District. The study used a mixed-method design involving 120 women, with data collected between December 2024 and March 2025. The authors reported improvements in mobility, financial autonomy, employment participation and social inclusion.

Devasena and Anushiya (2026) conducted a bibliometric and research-gap analysis of literature concerning the Tamil Nadu Zero-Ticket Bus Travel Scheme and women's empowerment. Their analysis identifies major research themes including economic empowerment, safety and policy implications.

CONCLUSION

Tamil Nadu's fare-free bus scheme for women represents a major experiment in socially oriented public transport policy. Its importance extends beyond the elimination of bus fares: it recognises mobility as a prerequisite for economic opportunity, social participation and gender equality. Available evidence indicates that the scheme has substantially increased women's use of public buses and generated meaningful household savings. Government data indicate very large utilisation, while independent research confirms improvements in mobility and financial relief for many women.

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