

IMPACT OF VIDIYAL PAYANAM SCHEME ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NAMAKKAL DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU

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Abstract : The Vidiyal Payanam Scheme, launched by the Tamil Nadu government in 2021, provides free bus travel to women and transgender individuals, aiming to enhance mobility, economic independence, and overall empowerment. This study evaluates its impact specifically in Namakkal district, a semi-urban and rural area known for its agricultural and textile industries, where women's workforce participation has historically been limited by transportation barriers. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys of 150 women beneficiaries and secondary data analysis, the research finds significant improvements in monthly savings (average Rs. 850), increased work and education participation (up by 42%), and enhanced decision-making autonomy (65% reported greater household influence). However, challenges like overcrowded buses and rural route limitations persist. The scheme has facilitated over 15.8 crore journeys by women in Namakkal alone, underscoring its role in fostering gender equity. Recommendations include route expansions and awareness campaigns to maximize benefits.

IndexTerms – Vidiyal Payanam, women empowerment, economic independence, Namakkal district, free bus travel

I. Introduction

Women empowerment in India remains a critical agenda, intertwined with economic, social, and political dimensions. In Tamil Nadu, cultural and infrastructural barriers often restrict women's mobility, limiting access to education, employment, and healthcare. The Vidiyal Payanam Scheme (formerly Magalar Urimai Thogai Thittam) addresses this by waiving bus fares on state-run transport, enabling women to travel freely across the state. Launched on March 8, 2021, it has revolutionized women's access to opportunities, with statewide data showing 730 crore free journeys and average monthly savings of Rs. 888 per beneficiary.

Namakkal district, with a population of approximately 1.7 million (as per 2011 Census, projected to 1.9 million in 2025), exemplifies these challenges. Predominantly rural (72% rural population), it features high female labor force participation in unorganized sectors like poultry farming and textiles, yet low literacy rates among women (68% as of 2023). This study examines how Vidiyal Payanam has influenced empowerment indicators in Namakkal, contributing to broader Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality).

II. Objectives

- ❖ To assess the scheme's role in enhancing women's economic mobility and savings.
- ❖ To evaluate changes in work participation, education access, and decision-making power.
- ❖ To identify barriers and propose policy enhancements for Namakkal.

III. Literature Review

The study published in the International Journal of Novel Research and Development by Sengani and Sathyajothi (2025) analyzes the influence of the Vidiyal Payanam scheme on women's economic empowerment and independence. The paper highlights that the scheme has significantly reduced women's dependency on male family members for transportation expenses, thereby enhancing their mobility and participation in income-generating activities. The findings suggest that free travel not only supports access to workplaces and markets but also encourages women to pursue self-employment, education, and healthcare services without financial burden. The study concludes that the scheme plays a crucial role in strengthening women's financial autonomy and social agency.

According to a report in The Times of India (2025), over 730 crore free journeys have been undertaken under the Vidiyal Payanam scheme since its implementation. This large-scale utilization reflects the widespread reliance of women across Tamil Nadu on public transport for daily activities. The article emphasizes that the scheme has particularly benefitted women from rural and lower-income households, for whom travel costs earlier acted as a barrier to employment, education, and public participation. The volume of usage demonstrates the scheme's relevance and acceptance among women beneficiaries.

An article in DT Next (2025) positions Tamil Nadu's welfare initiatives, including Vidiyal Payanam, as a model for other states in India. The report notes that the program has helped create a supportive environment where women feel encouraged to step out

of traditional domestic roles and engage in public life. The emphasis is placed on the policy's inclusiveness, reach, and its ability to bridge gender mobility gaps. The article suggests that Vidiyal Payanam represents not just a transportation subsidy, but a strategic empowerment tool embedded in the state's gender-sensitive development framework.

The New Indian Express (2024) highlights that nearly 57 lakh women utilize the free bus travel scheme on a daily basis. This widespread daily usage demonstrates the scheme's importance in improving access to essential services such as education, health care, and employment opportunities. The article points out that the scheme has considerably eased the financial pressure on households, especially among economically weaker sections. The high participation rate is cited as evidence of the scheme's direct role in increasing women's social mobility and autonomy in decision-making.

A study by Dr.R.Rajini and Dr.S.Bhuvaneswari (2025) assesses the utilization of the Vidiyal Payanam scheme in the Udumalpet region. The study finds that the scheme has significantly contributed to increasing women's participation in Self Help Groups (SHGs), local markets, and small-scale entrepreneurial activities. Women reported higher levels of social confidence and public interaction after benefiting from free travel. However, the study also suggests that better awareness sessions and supportive infrastructure, such as increased bus frequency in interior villages, are needed to maximize the impact of the program.

IV. Research Methodology

This descriptive and exploratory study employed a stratified random sampling of 150 women beneficiaries aged 18-55 from Namakkal's urban (Namakkal town) and rural (blocks like Puduchatram and Elachipalayam) areas. The sample was divided: 60% rural, 40% urban; 50% working women, 30% students, 20% homemakers. Primary data was collected via structured questionnaires (n=150, response rate 92%) and semi-structured interviews (n=20) from July to September 2025. Secondary data drew from Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation reports and district surveys.

4.1 Variables

- ❖ Independent: Access to free bus travel (frequency, distance).
- ❖ Dependent: Empowerment metrics (savings, job/education participation, decision-making index via Likert scale).

4.2 Statistical Tools Used

ANOVA for demographic variations in savings; regression analysis for scheme utilization's impact on empowerment; chi-square for associations.

4.3 Hypothesis

Vidiyal Payanam significantly positively correlates with women's economic and social empowerment in Namakkal ($p < 0.05$).

V. Data Analysis and Findings

Table 5.1: Demographic Profile

Demographic	Category	Percentage (n=150)
Age	18-25 Years	52%
	26-35 Years	25%
	Above 36 Years	23%
Marital Status	Unmarried	55%
	Married	45%
Occupation	Student	48%
	Working women	35%
	Housewife	17%
Education	Graduate	52%
	School or below	48%
Family Income	Low (Rs.10000-15000)	52%
	Medium(Rs.15001-25000)	28%
	High (Above Rs.25000)	20%
Locality	Rural	60%
	Urban	40%

Source: Primary Data

The majority were young, single students from low-income households (average family income Rs. 10,000-15,000).

VI. Key Statistics

9.1 Journeys and Savings:

78% of respondents made 2+ daily trips post-scheme, up from 45% pre-launch. Average monthly savings: Rs. 850 (range Rs. 500-1,200), aligning with state averages but lower in rural areas due to fewer routes. In Namakkal, district-wide journeys reached 15.8 crore by mid-2025, saving women an estimated Rs. 1,200 crore collectively.

9.2 Empowerment Indicators:

Work participation rose 42% (from 28% to 70% among respondents); education access improved for 65% of students via reduced dropout risks. Decision-making power (e.g., financial choices) increased for 65%, per Likert scores (mean 4.2/5).

Table 9.3: Analysis of Variance Result

Factor	F value	P value
Age	6.45	0.001
Occupation	7.12	0.000
Locality	5.89	0.002

Significant differences existed, with working women in urban areas saving most (Rs. 1,050 avg.).

9.3 Regression Analysis:

Scheme utilization explained 41% variance in empowerment ($R^2=0.41$, $\beta=0.62$ for mobility on decision-making, $p<0.01$), supporting Hypothesis (H1).

9.4 Chi-Square Test:

No significant association between marital status and trip frequency ($\chi^2=2.34$, $p=0.31$), but strong link with occupation ($\chi^2=12.67$, $p=0.002$).

VII. Conclusion

In Namakkal, Vidiyal Payanam emerges as a transformative tool for women empowerment, boosting economic independence and social agency. By facilitating 15.8 crore journeys, it has not only saved resources but reshaped lives, aligning with Tamil Nadu's progressive welfare model. Sustained success requires expanding rural routes and integrating skill programs. Policymakers should prioritize such schemes to achieve equitable growth. Vidiyal Payanam has demonstrably empowered Namakkal women by alleviating transport costs, mirroring statewide trends where 57 lakh women benefit daily. Savings enable investments in health and education, reducing gender gaps. However, rural women face overcrowding echoing broader critiques of infrastructure.

VIII. Suggestions

To improve women's mobility and access to educational, healthcare, and employment services, it is recommended that the Government of Tamil Nadu and TNSTC increase the frequency of buses in remote and underserved rural areas of Namakkal District. Ensuring reliable, safe, and timely transportation will significantly support women's participation in society.

Awareness campaigns on women's rights, financial literacy, self-employment opportunities, and available welfare schemes should be intensified in blocks where literacy levels are comparatively low.

Vidiyal Payanam should collaborate with local NGOs and community-based organizations to continuously monitor and document women's empowerment outcomes. Such partnerships will help ensure transparency, provide third-party feedback, track progress over time, and identify areas where policy or training improvements are needed.

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