

## **The Empowerment of Transgender People through Free Bus Travel Scheme in Villupuram District, Tamil Nadu**

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### **Introduction**

From ancient to modern period, the transgender community has faced lot of constrains from the society, even their own family. Because, the stigma over there for consisting transgender member in the family. Women and transgender are the socially discriminated, marginalized for long years. But, the modernization and literacy have transformed the society and the instinct of the people, and providing the social status to the above communities. However, their positions not reach a better position to compare with men and women. A State Government of Tamil Nadu has been focused the development of the each citizen by its schemes and programmes. On the consequences, the Government has planned to provide free bus travel for women, transgender, and physically challenged. Perhaps, this vision has revealed in the election manifesto on the election campaign. Indeed, the election manifesto possessed lot of freebies and doles might be the most populism in Tamil Nadu. Indeed, Election manifest calling it the “Second Hero” and party candidates being the “first hero”.<sup>1</sup>After getting the power and implemented wise schemes like free travel scheme for enhancing the mobility for the marginalized class. The transgender people earnings might be biggest challenge in the modern society. But this scheme made several changes in the economical fields, benefited to the same. This article has focused how the free travel scheme empowers the transgender community in Villupuram District.

### **Villupuram District**

Villupruam District was composed with South Arcot districts. It is bounded on the north on Chinglepet and North Arcot districts, on the east by the sea and the west by the Salem District.<sup>2</sup> Villupuram alias Vizhupuram is the 32<sup>nd</sup> district from Tamil Nadu which has been formed in 30<sup>th</sup> September 1993.Villupuram district, being a big district to bifurcate for the administrative convenience and new district has formed and named Kallakurichi, acted as headquarter too.Villupuram district lies between 11° 38' 25" N 12 20' 44" S, 78 15'00' W and 79 42' 55' E with concealed area 3725 sq.kms.<sup>3</sup>It has adjoining the on the west by Kallakurichi district(bifurcated from Villupuram), on the north by Kanchipuram and Thiruvannamalai, then south and east as Cuddalore District.<sup>4</sup> This district consisted 2 major revenue divisions, 9 administrative taluks, have 932 revenue villages, 2 municipalities, 8 town panchayats with 13 blocks and around 693 village panchayats.

### **Status of Transgender in the society**

The society was broadly divided into two categories like male and female. Nobody think about the transgender community and welfare of the people. However, both central and State Government of India implemented innovative scheme for enhancing the position of the people after Independence. However, their status did not reach in high level. Still they are struggling to earn money and survive their life ever. The term “transgender” belongs to the latin word “trans”, which means in English as “gender”. No particular form of sexual orientation is meant through the term transgender.<sup>5</sup> They otherwise have known as ‘Hijiras’ also termed as Third gender. Until then, the society has called the transgender people as “Ussu”, “Pottai” (impotent man), “oothu”, also they traditionally called as “aravani”. The social identity of the community has worse than other communities in the world.

### **Transgender in Villupuram District**

The Tamil Nadu has consisted transgender population around 22, 364<sup>6</sup> high rate in India with 4.58%.<sup>7</sup> Villupuram district is an important place for transgender community where the holy place or sacred place held in the village named Koovagam. In Tamil Nadu, there are 32 temples famous for the transgender such as Singanallur, Kanjapalli, Kumaramangalam, Kurinji, Kuttampatti, Thudiyalur held in Coimbatore District, Koththattai, Bhuvanagiri, Devanampattinam, Thiruvetkalam in Cuddalore District, Kalagiriya in Erode District, Pazhayasuramangalam, Panaimadal, Pelur, Thodavoor in Salem District, Serppapattu, Kezvanampatti, Devanoor, Vedandhi, Veranendthal in Thiruvannamalai District, Chozhavaram, Odukatthur, Pulimedu, Pudhur, Vellayampatti, Varagur in Vellore District, Koovagam, Konalur, Pennaivalam, Thilapuram in Villupuram District, Madukkarai and Pillayarkuppam in Puducherry.<sup>8</sup> Among them Koovagaam is the foremost in the State of Tamil Nadu.

Koovagam is located in Ulundurpet taluk in Villupuram District. A temple has primary deity of Aravan, son of the Arjuna glorified as Kothandavar. A long festival was celebrated for the Transgender community around 18 days in the Tamil month of *Chitirai* (April/May). This might be the biggest festival in Asia. The devotees may visit the temple from Mumbai, Calcutta, Kerala and Bangalore.<sup>9</sup> In Madhabharatha, the Pandavas has sacrificed someone to the Goddesses Kali to win the battle. Aravan was agreed to sacrifice himself, but he has desired to marry before the sacrifice. While Lord Krishna took Avatar as Mohini and married Aravan, the next day Aravan sacrificed himself. By reflection, the transgender were tied a sacred thread (*thali*) around their neck from the priest. After this event the priest broke the bangles and symbolically turned them as widows.<sup>10</sup>

### **Election of Legislative Assembly, 2021**

The elections for all 234 Assembly seats in Tamil Nadu were held in a single phase on April 6, in which 70.72% of registered voters participated. The DMK party clinches great victory and won 125 seats, and ADMK party won 65 seats on legislative assembly election. The DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) has clinched the victory in Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly election - 2021. This election has witnessed that the first in the State where the two towering personalities both M. Karunanidhi and J. Jayalalitha absence for their death. The DMK party has alliance with the national party of Congress, and grasped 150 seats, out of 234 seats. The AIADMK party has clinched (the ruling party) close up with 80 seats<sup>4</sup>. After the victory, the DMK leader has nominated as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu and sworn in May 7, 2021.<sup>5</sup> After assumed the post of Chief Minister,

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M.K.Stalin has signed the five important orders. Among them free bus travel for women might prominent as benefitted much. However, the AIADMK has announced the welfare scheme for the women as 50 percent concession on the manifesto.<sup>6</sup>

While DMK has clinched the victory on the election they implemented the scheme atone. Earlier, Punjab<sup>12</sup> and Delhi<sup>13</sup> had implemented the scheme before Tamil Nadu. Soon after the sworn as a chief minister of Tamil Nadu; M.K.Stalin signed five files to implement major promises, free bus travel for working women might be one among them.<sup>14</sup> Tamil Nadu has 8 State Transport which possess 19, 073 stage carrier buses, among them 6339 buses are classified as ordinary buses accounting thirty five percent. There are around 1.6 crore passengers travelled in Tamil Nadu, which implies there are 839 daily passengers by bus. Government assumed that there would be around 18 lakh women travelled every day, around 40 percent of the total passengers. The state Government has contributed around Rs. 1200 crore annually, for contributing the women passengers to travel free of cost.

### Nomenclature

This scheme has been called as ‘free bus travel for women’ which provides the free travel for women in Tamil Nadu, especially Government buses. The objective of the scheme may provide free travel to women for earnings and education. The guidelines of the scheme has been restricted the conductor and driver for handing the passengers for free travel. Because, Government does not want any women passenger blamed to travel for free.<sup>7</sup> After the implementation of the free travel for women, the transgender has requested to the chief minister to provide free travel for their community. At once their request approved and provided the free travel under this scheme. In Tamil Nadu, around 7.8 million women were travelled in the bus under this scheme for the first three days after implementation of the scheme.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the women passengers around 2.8 million benefitted under this scheme in Tamil Nadu.

### Beneficiaries

The people from Villupuram district depended on the income of agriculture. Still they have struggling to improve their life for several years. On the consequences, the Government has focused to uplift the position of women and transgender by their schemes and programmse. On the path, the scheme to provide free travel should enhance the economical status. The Villupuram District has some technical division on the road transport which categories under below.

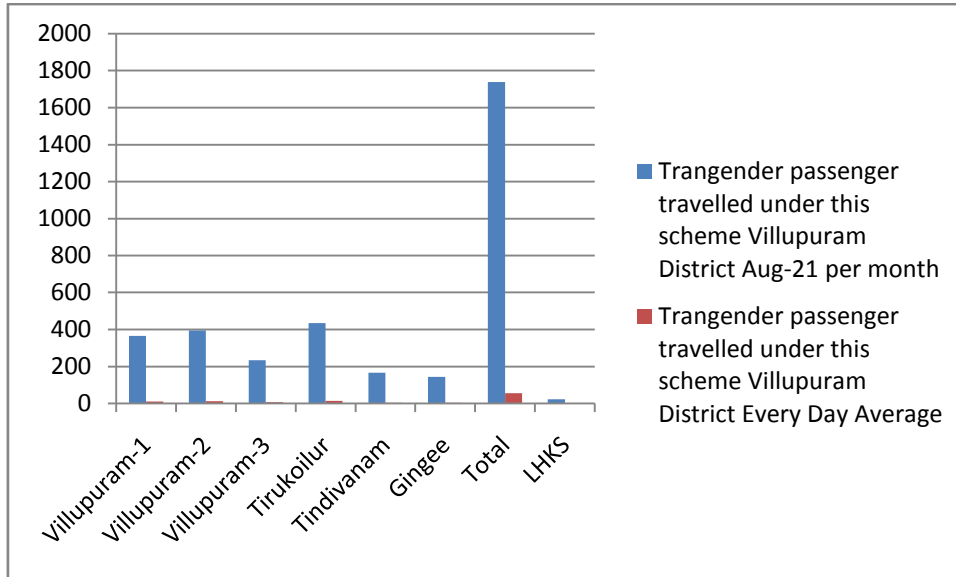
**Table No.1: Transgender passenger travelled in Villupuram district**

Branch	Town Bus	Aug-21 per Month	Per Day Average
Villupuram-1	26	366	12
Villupuram-2	29	395	13
Villupuram-3	22	234	8
Tirukoilur	26	434	14
Tindivanam	40	166	5
Gingee	24	143	5
Total	167	1738	56
LHKS	-	23.13	0.75

**Source<sup>12</sup>**

The data shows that averagely 0.75 transgender travelled every day. Also this beneficiary benefited averagely 23.13 percent monthly in Villupuram district.

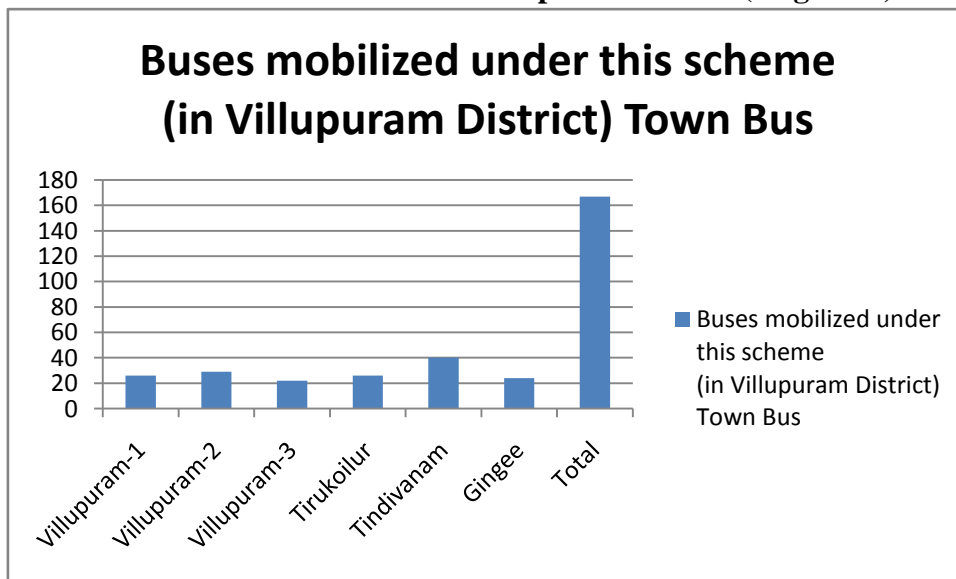
**Table No.1: Transgender passenger travelled in Villupuram district(Aug-2021)**



**Source<sup>13</sup>**

Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation has possessed around 9000 buses all over the State. Among them 5600 buses are the ordinary bus services. Apart from this buses are deluxe and air-conditioned buses. The ordinary fare buses have been pasted with stickers which shown as “free travel for women” both depicted Tamil and English languages.

**Table No.3:Town Bus list in Villupuram District(Aug-2021)**



**Source<sup>14</sup>**

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### Pink tickets

All over India, some of the states have implemented free of cost travel for women and given pink tickets for them. By the same, State Government of Tamil Nadu has given the pink tickets for the transgender people mentioned the word “*Moondram Palinathavar*” (in English meaning “Third Gender”). However, the social organizations and transgender people opposed to mention them as Third Gender.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the above tickets withdrawal and introduced the new pink tickets with mentioned “*Thirunagai*” (*Thi.Thai*), which former chief minister of Tamil Nadu Karunanidhi coined the word for transgender people. Tamil Nadu might be the first ever state which started welfare Board (TGWD) for the transgender in 2008, named always role model for the other states in India.<sup>16</sup> Also, Transgender day was celebrated in Tamil Nadu on April 15 every year. Moreover, the board has given the award who has contributed the society and welfare of the people. However, the word “*Thirunagai*” dropped from official circulars and mentioned again as third gender in 2019.<sup>17</sup> At present, the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) party has taken the power and call them transgender as “*Thirunanagai*”.

### Expenses

The Tamil Nadu Government has bared the amount around 1500 crore for the scheme of free bus travel annually. The women were travelled in ordinary bus services on 40 percent. Now, it has gradually risen after the announcement of the scheme which reached around 68 percent. Some of the places in Tamil Nadu benefitted more than 68 percent. The schemes have taken lot of amount for providing the free travel but the results of schemes are positive approach. However, this scheme has more expense for the Government and biggest burden for the same, and leads the debt for the State. The Finance Minister of Palanivel Thiyagarajan stated that “The Manifesto was a painkiller, but the reality will be a migraine for the ordinary Tamil”.<sup>18</sup>

**Freebies culture and Tamil Nadu State Debt Responsibility**

S. No	Year	State Responsibility	Debt	Tenure	Party
1	2006	Rs.57, 457 Crore		CM Karunanidhi	DMK
2	2011	Rs.1,01, 349 Crore		CM J Jayalalitha	AIADMK
3	2015	Rs.1,87,036 Crore		CM J Jayalalitha	AIADMK
4	2021	Rs.4,85,502 Crore		CM E Palanisamy	AIADMK
5	2022	Rs.5,70, 189.29 Crore		To be deducted by the next assembly election	DMK

Source<sup>19</sup>

### Conclusion

Tamil Nadu has been planning the schemes for enhancing the status of every individual by social, economic, and political phenomenon. But the male centric society dominated in the fields and revokes the status of women and transgender. Indeed, the Central and State Government implementing innovative schemes for enhancing the position of transgender over the years. But the

lack of awareness, illiteracy, and economy, transgender not get proper welfare. However, the State Government of Tamil Nadu has focused to develop the status by the schemes. On the consequences, the free travel scheme helps the transgender to frequently mobilize in the Villupuram district by free travel scheme. This scheme may give lot of opportunities to the transgender for enhancing the economical status and grasping proper education, especially those belongs to the rural background. Thus, the free bus travel scheme helps the transgender to empower the transgender ever.

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