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Impact of Stree Shakti Free Bus Travel on Women's Mobility and Economic Opportunities: Evidence from Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai Districts of Andhra Pradesh

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Abstract

Transportation is an important factor influencing women's access to education, employment, healthcare and markets. The Government of Andhra Pradesh introduced the Stree Shakti free bus travel scheme on 15 August 2025 for eligible women, girls and transgender persons on specified APSRTC services. This study examines the scheme's potential impact on women's mobility, with special reference to Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts. The study uses secondary data from APSRTC, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Census of India, district statistical reports and published sources. During the first year, the scheme recorded more than 87 crore journeys. Average daily female ridership increased from 9.47 lakh to about 24 lakhs, an increase of 153.1 per cent, while women's share of APSRTC passengers increased from 40 per cent to 62 per cent. Government expenditure was approximately ₹3,095 crore, or about ₹35.6 per journey. The findings suggest that the scheme has substantially increased women's use of public transport and reduced direct travel costs. These benefits are particularly relevant to rural women in Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts. However, overcrowding, rural connectivity, financial sustainability and limited district-level data remain important challenges.

Keywords: Stree Shakti, women's mobility, free bus travel, APSRTC, women empowerment, employment, Anantapur, Sri Sathya Sai.

1. Introduction

Transportation is an important determinant of women's economic and social participation. In rural areas, women often depend on public transport to reach colleges, workplaces, hospitals, markets and government offices. High travel costs can restrict their mobility and access to opportunities.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh introduced the Stree Shakti free bus travel scheme on 15 August 2025. Eligible women, girls and transgender persons domiciled in Andhra Pradesh can travel free on specified APSRTC services.

The scheme has resulted in a substantial increase in women's public transport use. During its first year, more than 87 crore journeys were recorded. Average daily female ridership increased from 9.47 lakh to approximately 24 lakhs, representing a 153.1 per cent increase. Women's share of APSRTC passengers

increased from 40 per cent to 62 per cent. Government expenditure during the first year was approximately ₹3,095 crore.

This study focuses on Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts, where a large rural population depends on road transport to access employment, education, healthcare and markets.

2. Objectives and Methodology

Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Examine the performance of the Stree Shakti scheme.
2. Analyse changes in women's use of public transport.
3. Examine potential transportation cost savings.
4. Assess the relevance of the scheme to Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts.
5. Identify major challenges and policy requirements.

Methodology

The study is based on secondary data obtained from APSRTC, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Census of India, district administrations, District Handbooks of Statistics and published reports.

Simple statistical methods such as percentage change, averages and ratios are used.

A major limitation is that detailed district-wise data on Stree Shakti beneficiaries, journeys and subsidy expenditure are not publicly available in sufficient detail. Therefore, State-level scheme data are combined with district-level demographic and socio-economic information.

3. Study Area

Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai are important districts of the Rayalaseema region. Both contain extensive rural areas and depend significantly on road transportation.

Sri Sathya Sai district was formed in 2022 from the erstwhile Anantapur district. It has an area of approximately 7,771 sq. km., 29 revenue mandals and 430 villages. Important towns include Hindupur, Dharmavaram, Penukonda, Kadiri and Puttaparthi.

Anantapur also contains a large rural population and important urban centres providing employment, education, healthcare and commercial services.

The rural character of both districts makes affordable public transportation particularly important for women.

4. Performance and Analysis of Stree Shakti

Table 1: Major Performance Indicators

Indicator	Before Scheme	After One Year
Daily women commuters	9.47 lakh	24 lakhs
Women's share of APSRTC passengers	40%	62%
Total journeys	—	87+ crore
Government expenditure	—	₹3,095 crore
Covered-route occupancy	—	93%

Source: APSRTC/Government-reported figures.

4.1 Increase in Female Ridership

Daily female ridership increased from 9.47 lakh to 24 lakh.

Percentage increase = (24 − 9.47) ÷ 9.47 × 100 = 153.1%

Thus, female ridership increased by approximately 153%.

This indicates that transportation cost was an important barrier to women's use of public transport.

4.2 Women's Share of Passengers

Women's share of APSRTC passengers increased from 40 per cent to 62 per cent.

Increase = 62 − 40 = 22 percentage points

The relative increase was:

22 ÷ 40 × 100 = 55%

This indicates a substantial change in the composition of APSRTC passengers.

5. Financial Impact

The government spent approximately ₹3,095 crore during the first year, while more than 87 crore journeys were recorded.

The approximate expenditure per journey was:

₹3,095 crore ÷ 87 crore = ₹35.6

Therefore, the average government expenditure associated with a journey was approximately ₹35.6.

Table 2: Financial Indicators

Indicator	Value
First-year expenditure	₹3,095 crore
Total journeys	87+ crore
Approximate expenditure per journey	₹35.6
Daily subsidy	₹8.53 crore

The expenditure represents a significant public investment in women's mobility. Its economic justification should therefore be assessed not only through passenger numbers but also through changes in women's welfare and economic participation.

6. Potential Economic Benefits

The direct benefit is the elimination of eligible bus fares.

For example, if a woman previously spent ₹50 per day on bus travel for 25 days a month:

Monthly saving = ₹50 × 25 = ₹1,250

Annual saving = ₹15,000

For a woman earning ₹10,000 per month, this would represent 12.5 per cent of annual income.

This is only an illustrative calculation; actual savings differ according to travel frequency and distance.

The wider economic mechanism can be expressed as:

Lower transport cost → increased mobility → greater access to opportunities → potential increase in employment and income.

Free travel can help women reach workplaces, colleges, hospitals, markets, banks and government offices more easily.

However, free transportation alone cannot guarantee employment. Employment also depends on education, skills, wages, availability of jobs, childcare and family responsibilities.

7. Relevance to Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai Districts

The scheme is particularly relevant to women in rural areas who travel to nearby towns for employment, education, healthcare and markets.

In Anantapur district, major towns and service centres provide opportunities for surrounding rural communities. Similarly, Hindupur, Dharmavaram, Penukonda, Kadiri and Puttaparthi are important economic and service centres in Sri Sathya Sai district.

Free transportation can reduce the financial distance between villages and these centres.

However, the benefits depend on the availability and frequency of buses. Therefore:

Free travel + adequate connectivity = effective mobility benefit.

8. Major Challenges

Overcrowding

Covered-route occupancy reached approximately 93 per cent, indicating strong demand. High occupancy can result in overcrowding, longer waiting times and passenger discomfort.

Financial Sustainability

The first-year expenditure of approximately ₹3,095 crore represents a substantial fiscal commitment. Timely reimbursement to APSRTC is essential for maintaining bus services and infrastructure.

Rural Connectivity

Women living in villages with inadequate bus services cannot fully benefit from the scheme. Greater attention is required for remote and low-frequency routes.

Lack of District-Level Data

Detailed district-wise information on beneficiaries, journeys, subsidy expenditure and purpose of travel is needed to measure the actual impact in Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts.

9. Major Findings

The study indicates that:

1. Female ridership increased by approximately 153.1 per cent.
2. Women's share of APSRTC passengers increased by 22 percentage points.
3. More than 87 crore journeys were recorded during the first year.
4. Government expenditure was approximately ₹3,095 crore.
5. Government expenditure per journey was approximately ₹35.6.
6. Covered-route occupancy reached about 93 per cent.
7. The scheme can substantially reduce women's transportation expenditure.
8. It has potential to improve access to employment, education, healthcare and markets.
9. The benefits are particularly relevant to rural women in Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts.
10. Its actual impact on employment and income requires district-level household data.

10. Policy Suggestions

1. Increase bus frequency on high-demand routes.
2. Improve connectivity to remote villages.

3. Publish district-wise Stree Shakti data.
4. Ensure timely reimbursement to APSRTC.
5. Improve toilets, drinking water, seating and safety facilities.
6. Monitor overcrowding using route-wise passenger data.
7. Connect rural villages with colleges, hospitals and employment centres.
8. Conduct annual surveys of women beneficiaries.
9. Link transportation policy with women's employment and skill-development programmes.

11. Limitations

The study has three main limitations. First, detailed district-wise Stree Shakti data are not publicly available in sufficient detail. Second, demographic data largely depend on the 2011 Census, whereas the scheme began in 2025. Third, increased ridership does not by itself establish a causal increase in employment or income.

Therefore, the findings should be viewed as an initial assessment of women's mobility and the economic potential of the scheme.

12. Conclusion

The Stree Shakti free bus travel scheme represents a major investment in women's mobility in Andhra Pradesh. During its first year, female daily ridership increased from 9.47 lakh to approximately 24 lakhs, an increase of 153.1 per cent. Women's share of APSRTC passengers increased from 40 per cent to 62 per cent, and more than 87 crore journeys were recorded.

The government expenditure of approximately ₹3,095 crore indicates the scale of the programme. The approximate expenditure of ₹35.6 per journey represents a significant transportation subsidy.

For Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai districts, the scheme has particular relevance because many women depend on public transport to reach towns for education, employment, healthcare and markets.

The available evidence strongly demonstrates increased mobility and reduced transportation costs. However, the effects on employment, income and empowerment require further district-level research.

The long-term success of Stree Shakti will depend on adequate bus capacity, rural connectivity, financial sustainability, passenger safety and systematic monitoring. District-level surveys in Anantapur and Sri Sathya Sai would provide stronger evidence on whether increased mobility is translating into measurable improvements in women's economic opportunities and household welfare.

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