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South India & Kerala Today

India's incredibly diverse fabric of cultures, peoples, religions, landscapes and languages is fascinating to observe as you travel around it. South India is no exception. While the south is very much part of the Indian nation, and decisions made in the national capital, Delhi, are as relevant here as everywhere else, there is a sense that the south is somehow different – as some would have it, more progressive and outward-looking than the north, but also more in touch with its Indian soul.

Best on Film

Fire (1996), **Earth** (1998) and **Water** (2005) The Deepa Mehta-directed trilogy on social issues was popular abroad, but controversial in India.

The Lunchbox (2013) A touching, romantic Mumbai (Bombay) tale directed by Ritesh Batra.

Dhobi Ghat (2011) Understated, absorbing story, directed by Kiran Rao, touching on many levels of Mumbai, and Indian, life.

Gandhi (1982) The classic, directed by Richard Attenborough and starring Ben Kingsley.

Best in Print

Midnight's Children Salman Rushdie's allegory about Independence and Partition.

White Tiger Page-turning novel about Indian class injustice, set partly in Bengaluru (Bangalore), by Aravind Adiga.

Shantaram Gregory David Roberts' vivid experiences of his life in India. A travellers' favourite!

A Fine Balance Rohinton Mistry's tragic but heart-warming tale of struggle for survival in Mumbai.

The God of Small Things Magically written novel of passion and caste in Kerala, by Arundhati Roy.

White Mughals Fascinating historical investigation into the Hyderabad of two centuries ago, by William Dalrymple.

The Balance Tilts Southward

In the early decades after Independence in 1947, many South Indians headed north in search of work. Today, the trend is in the opposite direction. Some pundits argue that better and more stable governance in the southern states (despite deep-seated corruption), and a less rigid caste system (allowing greater social mobility) have contributed to the south's upswing. Today, nearly all the states of South India have above-average literacy, employment, life expectancy, income per head, and female-to-male population ratio. The state of Kerala has the country's highest literacy rate and life expectancy, and is the only state with more women than men.

Mumbai (Bombay) has long been India's financial, commercial and industrial powerhouse, as well as its cinema and fashion capital. Chennai (Madras) makes one-third of all India's cars. Goa and, increasingly, Kerala are big tourism success stories. But the biggest story of all is the technology boom, which was sparked by India's economic liberalisation of 1991 and world globalisation. Bengaluru (Bangalore) is India's 'Silicon Valley', and with Hyderabad and Pune forms the 'Deccan Triangle' at the heart of India's IT industry, which generates vast export earnings. These three cities, with their big pool of well-educated, English-speaking, young professionals, also host research and development operations of some 150 top multinational companies. Chennai and Mumbai, along with Delhi, are the other cities making up India's IT big six.

Along with economic progress have come some problems, including the growth of city slums (an estimated 60% of Mumbai's population lives in slums), and dreadful traffic and pollution in the big cities – though new metro systems in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad are finally bringing transport in these cities into the modern age. Kerala, despite its education and health successes, has high unemployment and India's