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South India & Kerala Today

While South India is very much part of the Indian nation, subject to Delhi-based decisions, there is a sense that, with its locally focused politics, the south is different – some would say more progressive – with booming IT, tourism, film and automotive industries, and above-average employment, literacy and life expectancy. However, South India also faces major issues. Violence against women frequently hits headlines, alcoholism is an enormous problem, and there is ever-growing concern about climate change, pollution and lack of water resources.

Best on Film

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

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

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

Sairat (2016) Realistic, anti-Bollywood Marathi-language hit.

Best in Print

Midnight's Children (Salman Rushdie; 1981) Allegory on Independence and Partition.

White Tiger (Aravind Adiga; 2008) Page-turner about class injustice, partly in Bengaluru.

Shantaram (Gregory David Roberts; 2003) Vivid autobiography of Roberts' life in India.

A Fine Balance (Rohinton Mistry; 1995) Tragic, heart-warming tale of Mumbai survival.

The God of Small Things (Arundhati Roy; 1997) Magically written Kerala-based novel of passion and caste.

White Mughals (William Dalrymple; 2002) Historical investigation into 18th- and 19th-century Hyderabad.

The Balance Tilts Southward

In the decades after Independence in 1947, many South Indians headed north for work. Today, the trend is in the opposite direction. Some argue that better, more stable governance in southern states (despite deep-seated corruption) and a less rigid caste system have contributed to the south's upswing. Nearly all South Indian states now have above-average literacy, employment, life expectancy, income per head and female-to-male population ratio. Kerala has India's highest literacy rate.

Mumbai (Bombay) has long been India's financial, commercial and industrial powerhouse, and its film and fashion capital. Chennai (Madras) makes one-third of India's cars. Goa and Kerala are huge tourism success stories. But the biggest story is the technology boom, sparked by India's 1991 economic liberalisation and globalisation. Bengaluru (Bangalore) is India's 'Silicon Valley', and, with Hyderabad and Pune, forms the 'Deccan Triangle' at the heart of India's thriving IT industry, fuelled by well-educated, English-speaking, young professionals. Chennai (Madras), Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi round off India's IT big six.

Problems intertwined with economic progress include the growth of city slums (60% of Mumbai's population lives in slums) and dreadful traffic and pollution – though new metro systems in Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad are slowly modernising transport. Kerala, despite its education and health successes, has high unemployment and, until recently, India's highest alcohol-consumption rates (now claimed by Andhra Pradesh); in 2014 Kerala removed liquor licences from 700 bars, though full prohibition now looks unlikely. Chennai and Bengaluru unfortunately often top 'suicide capital' lists.