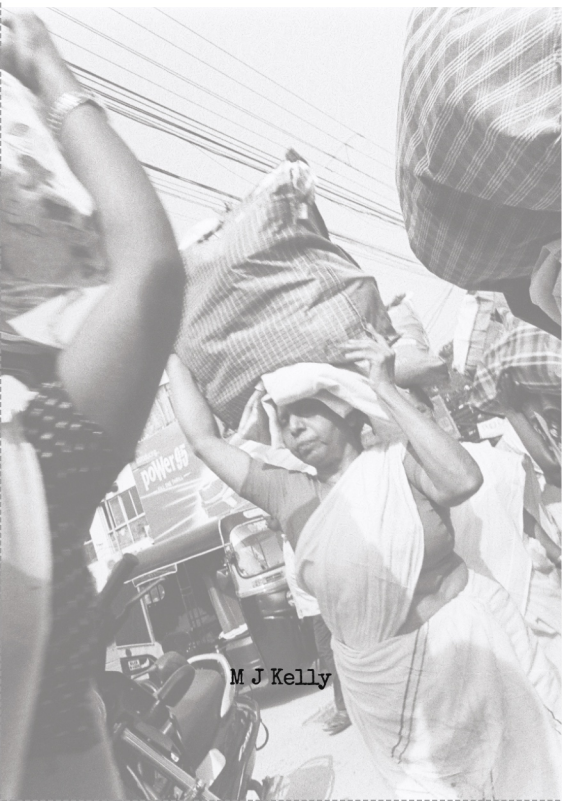




Attukal Pongala

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Attukal Pongala is the largest gathering of women in the world, drawing millions of devotees annually to Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala.

The festival honors Attukal Bhagavathy, identified with Kannaki from the Tamil epic *Silappatikaram*. According to legend, Kannaki's husband was wrongfully executed by the Pandyan king of Madurai. In her grief and rage at this injustice, she cursed the city, causing it to burn. After leaving Madurai, Kannaki journeyed to Kerala and stopped at Attukal, where she was venerated as a goddess. The pongala offering, a sweet rice porridge cooked in earthen pots, is prepared to appease the goddess and to seek her blessing.

Women line the streets for kilometers around the temple, cooking over open fires in a ritual that transforms urban space into sacred ground.

