

KERALA

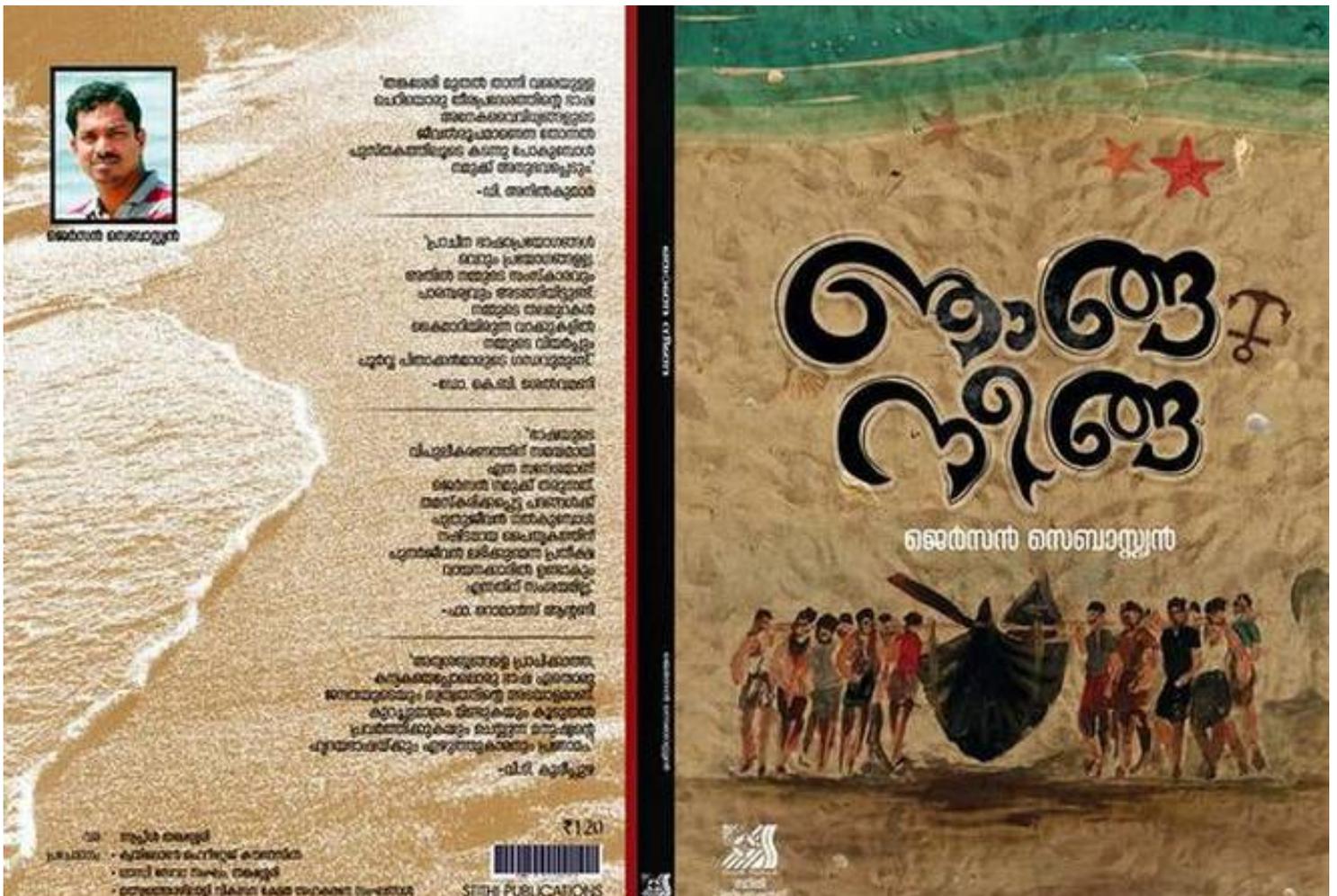
Njanga Neenga, to preserve a unique language

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Thangassery coastal language has a strong Portuguese and Dutch influence



When a fisherman from Thangassery says ‘achan’ he is not referring to his father, but the mighty sea mammal that rules the waves. In this coastal village, ‘kumabri’ means godfather and ‘memenda’ means memory, all the words part of a unique local language brimming with Portuguese and Dutch influence.

THE HINDU

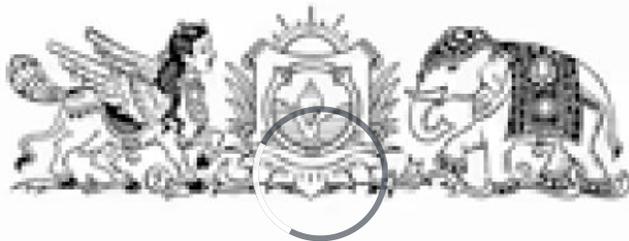
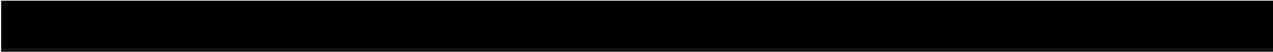
communication that usually leaves you puzzled and Jerson Sebastian's Njanga Neenga is a compilation of that special vocabulary.

The 102-page book which he calls 'a local text to coastal culture' introduces a total of 1,700 words spoken in the 10 'thuras' in Kollam from Thangassery to Thanni. "Currently only 10% of the second generation fishers use these words. Others are slowly switching to chaste Malayalam and this local idiom that evolved over four centuries may not survive for long," says the author.

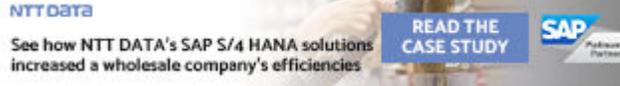
Jerson, an HR professional working in Saudi Arabia, first picked up the words from the conversation of his father and his mates.



"My father is a fisherman and during my childhood I used to help him after school hours. The words they used were not part of our language textbooks and I always found it quite intriguing. Since UNESCO is celebrating 2019 as international year of indigenous languages, I started preparing this coastal dictionary as the first step to preserving it," he says.



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Strange, but special

The distinctive feature of the Thangassery coastal language is its strong foreign influence, and you will find many Dutch, Portuguese and even Spanish expressions in the book. “Escriba is a Spanish word and here we use it for secretary and our evening prayer is called vespera. There are more than hundred such words that will sound strange, but they are part of our local culture.”

In the book you will find a wide range of words connected to fishing and Jerson says every coastal community in Kerala can contribute to it.

“In Vizhinjam and Thanni, there will be two different words referring to the same object. If we let the language die, we will also lose a treasure of indigenous wisdom. They can’t talk about their experience and expertise in formal Malayalam and we need to preserve it for future generations.”

He says that Kerala should have a ‘Kadal Shabdatharavali’ covering all the seashore villages and their lore.

“Recently, I came across ethnic groups who communicate through whistling and beating drums. If they all can be acknowledged as indigenous languages, Kerala’s coastal dictionary can also make it to the list,” he says.

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<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/njanga-neenga-to-preserve-a-unique-language/article29121662.ece>

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