

Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers

Project Report

Submitted by

Kavya Jinu (SB21CE015)

Under the guidance of

Dr. E. Priscilla

In partial fulfilment of requirements for award of the degree

Of Bachelor of Arts

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With Potential for

Excellence Accredited by NAAC with 'A++'

Grade

Affiliated to

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam-686560

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Declaration

I do affirm that the project “Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Communication Studies has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Ernakulam

Kavya Jinu

22-03-2024

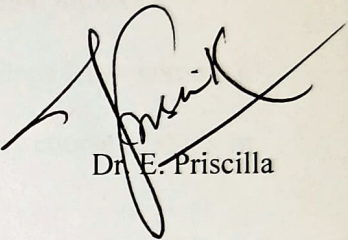
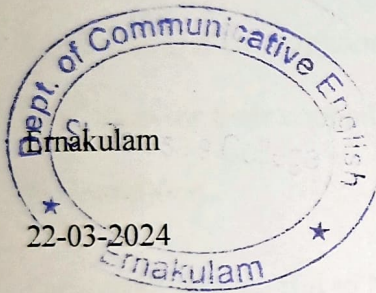
SB21CE015

B.A. English Literature and Communication Studies

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous)

Certificate

I hereby certify that this project entitled "Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers" by Kavya Jinu is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.



Dr. E. Priscilla

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Acknowledgement

I take this opportunity to offer my humble prayers and thanks to God Almighty for His mercy and blessings for the completion of this project.

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Abstract

The research work, “Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, aims to prove the Oscar winning documentary short film *The Elephant Whisperers*, as a door to understand the concepts of elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. Analysis of real- life evidences and research work done on the field, followed by a detailed study of the documentary proved the significance of *The Elephant Whisperers* in facilitating understanding regarding elephant cognition and emotional intelligence.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The world of the Elephants is a fascinating one, these majestic beings have more to them than just their strength. This project “Deciphering Elephant Cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, will explore the world of cognition and emotional intelligence among Elephants through the Oscar-winning Indian documentary, *The Elephant Whisperers*.

The Elephant Whisperers, an Indian documentary directed by Kartiki Gonsalves, an Indian director and producer won the 95th Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Film, making it the first Indian documentary to win an Oscar. This documentary was set in the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve located in the Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. The reserve hosts many endangered and vulnerable species including Asian Elephants, the main stars of this documentary. This documentary is specifically centred around the Theppakadu Elephant Camp, one of the oldest Elephant camps in Asia, established almost 140 years ago. *The Elephant Whisperers* narrates the story of men, animals and nature.

The film revolves around the lives of four main characters, Raghu, Ammu, Bellie and Bomman. Raghu, an Elephant calf became orphaned after his mother’s death due to electrocution. He along with his herd had entered the village due to severe drought, eventually stranding him from the rest of the herd. Raghu was found in a bad condition and efforts were made to reunite the stranded Elephant with his herd but the attempt failed. Following this the forest department had assigned Bomman and Bellie as his caretakers, unfolding a beautiful relationship between man and Elephants. Bomman and Bellie with love, care, dedication and hard- work revived Raghu and saved him from succumbing to death. This success of theirs, made the Forest department assign Ammu, a five-month-old Elephant

calf to them as caretakers. As the title of the film suggests, *The Elephant Whisperers* also tells the story of the humans who take care of the Elephants. It explores the lives of two such individuals, Bellie and Bomman. Bomman is both a priest as well as an Elephant caretaker. His job as an Elephant caretaker was passed down to him following his father's death. He had a near-death experience with an Elephant, yet he was grievous about Raghu's separation from him, a sign of the amount of love each other possesses. Bellie, though not an official caretaker, was assigned as a helping hand for Bomman. She had experienced many losses in her life, she had lost her daughter as well as her husband which made her closer to the Elephant calves, caring and supporting them like a mother. She overcame her fears of the forest, with the help of Ammu and Raghu. Bomman, Bellie, Ammu and Raghu over time became an inseparable family, the marriage montage of Bellie and Bomman, a few minutes into the documentary can be interpreted as a representation of this union.

Additionally, *The Elephant Whisperers* narrates the life of indigenous tribes in India. The documentary begins by introducing the viewers to the indigenous tribal population known as the Kattunayakan. The very first lines of the documentary truly help in capturing the very essence of the Kattunayakan tribes. The lines are said by Bomman, a Kattunayakan himself. It is as follows, "I am Kattunayakan. Kattunayakan means "Kings of the Forest". This is my home, where I belong... where the wild animals roam free". These words capture the identity of the Kattunayakan, as one with the forest. The way of the Kattunayakan can be very well understood from various instances in the documentary (E.g. them not wearing footwear in the forest as to them it is in the forest where the god lies). All these scenes help in illuminating the respect the Kattunayakan have towards the forest. They don't overexploit it and believe in its preservation. All of these instances it highlights the importance of the conservation of forests, as well as provide insights into areas relating to human-animal interaction and issues about it. Hence, making it even more relevant in the present-day world

where the aforementioned have risen. The relationship and the bond between the main characters add an emotional element to the whole experience.

The major areas highlighted in the documentary include wildlife and forest conservation, human-animal coexistence and harmony with nature. It also addresses issues about human-animal conflict. On top of that, a deeper study of the documentary provides insights into other areas such as the cognitive and emotional intelligence possessed by Elephants.

When it comes to humans, a share of conflicts arises out of misunderstandings. Understanding someone can help in mitigating such conflicts. The same goes for animals, they also need to be understood. Most of the time, animals enter human territories due to adverse conditions like drought. In the year 2021, the world witnessed a herd of wild Asian Elephants wandering hundreds of miles into the city of Kunming, China. Later, the cause for this migration has been identified as severe drought in their homeland. Here, the Elephants were forced to move out due to the extremely severe drought conditions. What David Attenborough said about the incident in the fourth episode of the second season of the *Our Planet* collections stand true here. He said, “But it showed that when animals are faced with dramatic change, the urge to move away can be overwhelming.” Furthermore, apart from natural calamities; human activities such as encroachment into forest areas also contribute to issues like human-animal conflict. A majority of such conflicts can be eliminated by trying to understand animals. Foregrounding it, an attempt is made to understand one such animal, the Elephant; taking humans one step closer to the world of animals.

The research work, aims to decipher Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence through the Oscar-winning Indian documentary *The Elephant Whisperers*. For this purpose, the research has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter, the introduction is a brief

account on the Oscar winning documentary and its significance to explore on elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. This chapter, also delves into the key aspects highlighted in the succeeding chapters.

The second chapter named, “Elephant cognition and Emotional intelligence”, like the name suggests, elucidates the concept of cognition and emotional intelligence with an emphasis on Elephants. It provides a basic framework for further studies on the concepts by laying down a sequential analysis of areas such as animal cognition, Elephant cognition, and emotional intelligence of Elephants. This chapter is followed by the main crust of the research, the third chapter, named “Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”.

In Chapter 3, “Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, the documentary is analysed through the lens of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. In this chapter, scenes from the documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* will be broken down to highlight instances that can convey and affirm the cognitive and emotional intelligence of Elephants. A parallelistic study of real- life occurrences that proves these observations will be provided to establish *The Elephant Whisperers* as a credible source for understanding cognition and emotional intelligence in Elephants. It will be done by bringing out similarities between real- life observations made on animal cognition particularly Elephant cognition and that of the scenes. The deciphering will be done through application of various findings made on the topic of animal and Elephant cognition.

“Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, the initial few pages start by providing a detailed analysis of the scenes from the documentary that highlights areas of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence such as

their communication system, altruistic nature, ability to understand emotions of others, solve problems and various other similar instances. In the latter half of the chapter real- life occurrences that account for the same will be illuminated. It concludes by depicting *The Elephant Whisperers* as a door for the general public for understanding Elephant cognition.

The concluding chapter of the research, aims to provide a comprehensive summarization of all the key points discussed in the previous two chapters. It provides a conclusion to the research by proving that the documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* will act as a medium to understand Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. This chapter underscores and explains why such a study is crucial in the present-day world by quoting real- life examples of human- animal conflicts in present day Kerala.

Chapter-2

Elephant cognition and Emotional intelligence

But perhaps the most important lesson I learned is that there are no walls between humans and the Elephants except those that we put up ourselves, and that until we allow not only Elephants, but all living creatures their place in the sun, we can never be whole ourselves (Anthony.)

Recognizing the importance of understanding animal behaviour is crucial. Understanding animal behaviour is essential for comprehending our behaviour, evolution, and the preservation of the world. The more we comprehend animal behaviour, the more we comprehend the animals themselves. This is not limited to domestic species, but extends to all animals, regardless of our interaction with them. Cognizance can be attained by bridging the gap between humans and animals. This chapter underscores the significance of bridging the gap through the Indian documentary *The Elephant Whisperers*. An attempt is made to analyse and comprehend areas pertaining to the cognitive abilities and emotional intelligence of Elephants.

Set in the picturesque Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu, *The Elephant Whisperers* an award-winning Indian documentary tells a captivating story about Elephants, humans, and the environment. In the Mudumalai Tiger Reserve, many endangered and vulnerable species can be found including the wild Indian Elephants, the stars of this documentary. A 41-minute running short documentary film delves into the lives of two young Elephant calves (Raghu and Ammu) and their caretakers Bellie and Bomman, who went above and beyond to ensure their survival and well-being. By delving deeper into *The*

Elephant Whisperers documentary, one can gain valuable insights into wildlife conservation, human-animal interactions, harmony with nature, and the challenges of man-wildlife conflicts. Furthermore, the documentary can be instrumental in deepening our knowledge of Elephant cognition, leading to a stronger bond between humans and Elephants.

Cognition is defined as the acquisition of knowledge through experiences and senses. The Oxford English Dictionary states that cognition comes from the Latin word 'cognit', meaning to know or acquaint. The concept of cognition was once exclusive to humans, but animal cognition has emerged as a prominent field in recent years. The field of cognition and animals has been a subject of ongoing debate for many years. Since the time of Aristotle, Charles Darwin, and Rene Descartes, the question of animal intelligence has remained a subject of constant debate. The existing evidence on the cognitive abilities of animals is plentiful. There is a field of research known as “animal cognition” which at present is steadily gaining prominence. Animal cognition is an area of study that examines animal thoughts and actions.

H. S. Terrace, in his work “Animal cognition: thinking without language”, he claims that “The only evidence that animals think is indirect evidence which must be gleaned from their behaviour.”. These lines imply that to comprehend cognition in animals, it is necessary to examine the behaviour of the animal. The documentary *The Elephant Whisperers*, assists in analysing Elephant behaviour and deepens our understanding of their cognition to enhance our understanding of Elephant cognition. Elephants are commonly recognized as the largest land animals. Elephants, which have the largest brains among terrestrial animals, raise the question: does brain size equate to intelligence? Surprisingly, scientists claim that there is no notable link between brain size and intelligence. For centuries, animals have been considered unintelligent beings by philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Currently, there is sufficient

evidence to assert that animals have cognitive abilities. Cognitive abilities make Elephants a popular choice for research among scientists.

Elephant cognition is a field that focuses on understanding the thought processes and behaviours of Elephants. The consensus is that Elephants are animals with advanced cognitive and emotional capabilities. Factors such as long-term memory, social intelligence, problem-solving skills, altruism, communication abilities, leadership, emotional complexity, and perception contribute to solidifying these claims. By employing techniques like playback procedure, vocal recording, study site, and statistical analysis, researchers made several intriguing findings about Elephants.

The cognitive abilities of Elephants are examined through the analysis of a few research works. Karen McComb et al., in the article titled “Elephants can determine ethnicity, gender, and age from acoustic cues in human voices” investigates the ability of Elephants to vary their defensive response by recognizing people's ethnicity and gender. Elephants' capacity to understand and distinguish different sounds demonstrates their perceptual abilities and cognitive skills like memory and retention. One noteworthy finding from this research is that Elephant herds led by older matriarchs exhibit faster and more appropriate responses to different levels of threats. In another experimental study titled "Leadership in Elephants: the adaptive value of age" by Karen McComb, et al. strengthens the aforementioned claims. Through the study, it can be inferred that the older the matriarch, the more familiar she is with the ecological conditions. It can be inferred logically that Elephants have the cognitive capability to retain long-term memories. Apart from such research, many real-life observations have been made on this subject matter.

Many behaviours depicted by Elephants are commonly considered as signs of their cognitive intelligence. The list of such behaviours and characteristics are endless, but some of

the most commonly analysed ones will be explored here. Problem solving skills, social intelligence, long term memory, Altruism, Self- awareness, Communication skills, and Playful nature are a few of the characteristics, generally treated as signs of intelligence. It is a predominant belief that humans are social animals, in other words, they are beings that cannot live in an isolated environment. Thus, it is evident that society plays a crucial role in the upbringing of human beings. In-fact social learning which is the process of learning from the society is vital in a human's life in many processes from communication, socialization etc. Society is a terminology not strictly applicable to the human beings but also encompasses other species.

A society is formed from interconnections of social relationships. In the animal kingdom there are many such beings that possess societal structure. One such being is the majestic Elephants. Typically, Elephants live and travel as herds, led by a matriarch; such a system helps them in protecting themselves from predators as well as to protect and nurture the calves to maturity. They like human beings, learn many things through socialization including gaining control over their trunks, learning their food habits etc. Like in the case of humans, Elephants also are influenced by the environment they grow. In- fact, absence of such a system can cause Elephants to deviate from their normal nature. Furthermore, the list of knowledge the Elephants learn from their herd continues. They learn usage of tools, vocalization, mothering skills etc. from their herd. In conclusion, Elephants are social beings that require the presence of their society; they understand their actions and emotions as well as of others making them socially intelligent beings. This is just one aspect of Elephants that highlights their cognitive intelligence. Their ability to use tools and their skill to solve problems are another feature that highlights it.

In the wild, Elephants skilfully breaking the branches to ward off flies is a common observation. Here, the Elephant is using both its skill to solve problems (flies) and its ability to use tools (branch). This is just one example of the many available regarding their ability to use tools. Additionally, Elephants are also known to possess phenomenal memory power. Memory power, the ability to remember, is vital to an Elephant. They have the ability to remember their fellow beings, as well as beings of other species. In addition, they use it in their day-to-day life for various purposes from finding water sources to identifying threats and danger. The earlier mentioned work “Elephants can determine ethnicity, gender, and age from acoustic cues in human voices” by Karen McComb et al. helps in highlighting this ability of theirs where they are able to identify and differentiate human voices, the work validates their ability to retain information for a prolonged period. Evidence for their remarkable memory power is in- fact plentiful, there are heart- warming instances of Elephants identifying people and fellow Elephants even after years of separation. Apart from their long- term memory power and ability to use tools there are other areas that are often looked into as signs of cognition. One such interesting quality Elephants possess is its altruistic nature.

Elephants are beings that are popularly known for their benevolent nature. They have been observed helping species belonging to theirs as-well-as those of others when in need. Instances of Elephants standing guard for stranded humans are evidence that prove the same. Additionally, they are also known for their playful nature, which they engage for many purposes from socialization to testing their strength. This takes us to the next point which is self- awareness. Self- awareness can be understood as the ability to understand and differentiate oneself. Researches have shown that Elephants are beings that can recognize oneself in a mirror, thus, accounting for the above. All the points mentioned here are features that are commonly considered as signs of Elephant cognition.

This research also aims to provide an understanding of emotional intelligence of the Elephants along with deciphering areas of cognizance. Emotions, in simple words, can be described as a state of feeling. The question of whether animals experience emotions, like the field of animal cognition, has been a topic of debate in the past and continues to be discussed even today. Recent research suggests that animals, contrary to previous beliefs, are capable of experiencing emotions and that species like Elephants possess emotional intelligence.

The term ‘Emotional intelligence’ was first introduced in the year 1990 in an article named “Emotional Intelligence” by renowned researchers, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer. They described it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and use this information to guide one’s thinking and actions.”. Even though the term was introduced by Salovey and Mayer, it was popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman through his book “Emotional Intelligence” in the year 1995. Goleman’s theory identifies various components of emotional intelligence.

Based on Daniel Goleman’s theory, there are five components of emotional intelligence namely: self- awareness, self- regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. To identify instances of emotional intelligence expressed by Elephants, having a basic understanding of what these terms mean becomes absolutely necessary. Self- awareness, the term literally means being aware of oneself. This simple term encompasses everything, it means having a holistic understanding of oneself (emotions, feelings, thoughts). The next terminology is ‘self- regulation’, it simply means regulating oneself. Just like self- regulation, another component of emotional intelligence is motivation. Motivation can be understood as an internal process that stimulates oneself for something which in-fact helps them in acting accordingly to achieve the same. The next component explored by Goleman is empathy,

which simply can be understood as the act of putting oneself in the shoes of others. Here, an individual is not just thinking about himself/ herself but about the others. It is a way of behaving and thinking where the situation is understood from the perspective of others. The last component of emotional intelligence is social skills, which can be understood as the skill sets an individual needs to act in a social setting. All these components together encompass and formulates emotional intelligence. On Earth, there are plenty of animals that possess emotional intelligence. One such animal that possesses Emotional Intelligence is the Elephants.

Elephants are famous for their emotional intelligence and complexities. The complex emotions experienced by Elephants are widely recognized. They experience emotions like grief, joy, empathy etc. An extract from *The Elephant Whisperer: My Life with the Herd in the African Wild* that truly captures the very essence of Elephants, their emotions and altruistic nature is the following, “they were taking conscious care to do so. While the sun arced through the sky, I watched amazed as they all took turns to act as an umbrella, slowly shifting their positions to ensure the struggling infant was always out of direct heat.”. The Elephants shielding their babies from the sun, taking turns to prevent exhaustion, solely represent pure emotions like love and care. Incidences of this kind illustrate the emotional intelligence of Elephants, as well as their problem-solving abilities, emphasizing their cognitive skills.

The documentary *The Elephant Whisperers*, serves as a pedestal to explore the fascinating world of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. In the following chapter, “Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, the documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* will be analysed under the lens of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence.

Chapter 3

Deciphering Elephant cognition and Emotional intelligence in *The Elephant Whisperers*

The aim of the chapter is to critically analyse the documentary “*The Elephant Whisperers*”, to highlight underlying instances of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence.

Observation is the process of monitoring. Elephants can’t communicate verbally; in order to understand them better, it becomes necessary to keenly observe them. The documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* begins with Bomman observing his surroundings, the dense forest, and the animals surrounding him. The opening scene can be interpreted in many ways. Considering the unfolding of events, it can be interpreted as a hint given by the film director to its viewers. It can be the director explaining the process of understanding wildlife, which is observing. Through critical observation and analysing *The Elephant Whisperers*, an attempt is made to decipher areas of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence in the documentary.

The first interaction between Bomman and Raghu helps in highlighting the emotional bond the two possess. As a viewer, it represented the relationship and bond a father and son shares. Bomman doesn’t call Raghu by his name nor does he rush into his morning duties of bathing the Elephant, on the contrary, he first bonded with him, addressing him as his child, his dear, enquiring about his sleep and wellbeing. In between Bomman and Raghu’s bath montage, a shot of a buffalo and egret is present. The relationship between a buffalo and egret is mutually beneficial where the egret gets food by feeding on the insects on the buffalo and the buffalo in return gets rid of the insects in its body. Showing this shot in between the bath

montage can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the mutually beneficial relationship Bomman and Raghu possess where both are depended on each other but unlike the latter, they have a much more bonded and emotionally connected relationship.

Bomman and Bellie being humans, their way of expression of love and care is familiar to the viewers but it's not the case for Ammu and Raghu. Elephants are very emotionally and cognitively complex beings. To understand them, it becomes crucial to observe and comprehend their behaviours. The complexity is also applicable to their communication system. Their communication system can be divided into two: vocal and non-vocal. They use these communication tools for various purposes such as alerting their herd, expressing their need and for many other purposes.

A non- vocal communication of theirs that is highlighted in the documentary is their use of trunk. Elephants use their trunk for various other purposes than just using it for drinking and eating. It acts as a tool for socialization, communication, problem solving, and for various other purposes.

Similar to human society, it is common among the Elephants to express love and care through touch. Ammu and Raghu illustrate this at various instances. Eight minutes into the documentary the viewers are introduced to Krishna, a fellow Elephant. From Bomman's description, it becomes evident that Krishna is a friend of Raghu's but even without a description their care for each other is evident from their behaviour. They caress each other with their trunks, a way of socialization as well as a projection of the care and trust they hold for each other. Furthermore, such socialization behaviours are not an isolated incident, in the wild too such phenomena are common where they engage in activities like greeting. Twenty minutes into the documentary viewers are introduced to Baby Ammu. The first interaction between Raghu and Ammu, also helped in capturing such socialization processes among

Elephants. Later on, as they familiarized themselves and became more bonded, such physical ways of expression of love and care became frequent. Elephants have also been noted to express such behaviours to other animals including humans, within the documentary itself such an instance is available. Thirty-two minutes into the documentary, Bellie is sitting outside Ammu's shelter grieving Raghu's separation from them. Here, viewers can note Ammu's efforts to reach out to Bellie with her trunk, she even pats her head. This gesture of Ammu can be interpreted as an act of consolidation for her dear Bellie. A similar gesture is found thirty-four minutes into the documentary when Bomman is caressed by her trunk, she even refuses to let go of his hands. The above scenes, is a depiction of Elephants use of their trunk to showcase their emotions. This not only depicts their abilities to express emotions but also accounts for the statement that Elephants are emotionally intelligent and cognitive animals as they can understand the love and care others feel towards them as well as express theirs highlights instances of Elephant's expression of love and care through non- vocal ways of communication. In the succeeding paragraph, their ability to communicate vocally will be deciphered.

Elephants communicate for various purposes such as to express their needs, excitement, grieve and ward of enemies etc. In the documentary there are many instances that captures their vocal communication system. Nine minutes into the documentary, Bomman calls out to Raghu from afar, hearing this Raghu runs towards him in making a happy and excited trumpet. During their interaction, hearing Bomman's words of encouragement, he again makes such excited and happy trumpets. Here, Raghu's trumpet expresses the excitement and joy he feels. A few minutes after this scene, the viewers are taken into Raghu's shelter where Bomman and Bellie are making food for him. Here he makes a soft trumpet, this can be interpreted as an expression of his needs (food or hunger in this case). A similar occurrence happens when Ammu calls for Bomman. Towards the end of the

documentary, Raghu is separated from his family (Bomman, Bellie and Ammu). When he is taken away, a grievous bellow is made by Ammu. It is her expression of her grieve in Raghu's separation from them. All these scenes help in depicting Elephants use of vocal communication for various purposes.

Additionally, these scenes apart from depicting Elephants' ability to express themselves through vocal and non- vocal means also shows their ability to understand the emotions of others. Both of these also represent the cognitive and emotional intelligence of Elephants as they can know their own emotions, recognize emotions of others as well as express their emotions and needs. These are not the only events in the movie that depict Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence.

Raghu and Baby Ammu enjoy playing with their ball very much, they enjoy this time to the fullest. Additionally, they also enjoy playing with water, splashing it all over explores of their problem-solving skills and playful nature. Furthermore, there is also a scene where Raghu taunts a hen on his walk, highlights the playful sides of Elephants. Two observations that, Elephants are creatures that feel emotions like joy, excitement and that they possess the skills to play explicates their cognition.

Additionally, they possess the skill to solve problems. There are various instances in the documentary that illuminate this. Looking back to the scene where Raghu is drinking water from the pipe; on this lens a lot of interpretation can be made. First, it highlights his skill to overcome difficulties (Problem solving skill). In detail, he can't drink from the tank unless he opens the pipe. Raghu overcame this difficulty by skilfully opening it with his trunk. Another depiction of their problem-solving skill is their knowledge of how to use a straw, in this case both Ammu and Raghu are skilled. Apart from depicting their problem-solving skill, it also highlights their abilities to use tools. Even in wild such phenomena are

pretty common for instance Elephants might break off a branch from a tree to wave the flies off. All of these behaviours are accounts for their cognition. It is to be noted that Elephants at times use these abilities of theirs for others of their own species and even for those not belonging to their species when in need. This takes to the next point which is altruism.

Altruism can be defined as an unselfish act for the wellbeing of others. Before deciphering the scenes from the documentary that highlights it, a recollection of the lines by Lawrence Anthony in his work, “The Elephant Whisperer: My Life with the Herd in the African Wild” is absolutely necessary as it help in capturing the very essence of an Elephant’s altruistic nature. The lines are as follows, “they were taking conscious care to do so. While the sun arced through the sky, I watched amazed as they all took turns to act as an umbrella, slowly shifting their positions to ensure the struggling infant was always out of direct heat.”. This line truly captures the very essence of altruism. Here, the Elephants are unselfishly protecting the calves from the scorching heat of the sun. Furthermore, in order to not wear out each other they are also taking turns, again illuminating both altruistic nature and their problem-solving skills. In the documentary too such instances are present.

The very first representation of their altruistic nature in the documentary is the interaction between Krishna and Raghu. In this scene, Raghu is troubled by a thorn stuck in his tongue and Krishna provides him a helping hand by taking the thorn out for him. Here, Krishna is helping out a fellow being in need. He also teaches Raghu to pluck grass, whose demonstration Raghu follows. Both these events depict the altruistic side of the Elephant. Another scene that captures this side of the Elephants is when Ammu comforts Bellie during their separation from Raghu; she pats her head providing comfort. A line said by Bellie that is very crucial under the lens of altruism is the following, “When I cried, Raghu wiped my tears with his trunk”. This line is a very significant one in this lens, it helps in highlighting the

Elephant's altruistic nature. Raghu is able to comprehend the emotions Bellie is going through and is providing her his support and comfort.

All of these scene's account for the altruistic nature of Elephants. In the wild there are various similar instances such as Elephants guarding stranded human beings etc. that highlight their altruistic nature. The aspects like problem solving, ability to communicate, altruism and playful nature have been described all of which are part of emotional and cognitive intelligence. A revisit of some of these scenes along with exploration of some new scenes is made to conclude the argument that the documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* is a door to the world of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence.

The cognitive intelligence of Elephants discussed recollecting the interaction between Krishna and Raghu, this interaction apart from highlighting the altruism and non- vocal communications among Elephants, aid in capturing the ability of Elephants to socialize.

Social learning is a very common phenomenon among the Elephants. It plays a crucial role in the upbringing of an Elephant, equipping the calves with knowledge regarding their eating habits, etc. The lines quoted by Bellie during Raghu's and Krishna's interaction, "There is only so much we can teach them. And there are things they can only learn from one of their own kind.", helps in solidifying the importance of social learning among Elephants. In this scene, Krishna is teaching Raghu on how to pluck grass. Raghu ability to comprehend and proceed truly helps in capturing social learning among Elephants.

A few minutes following this scene, a montage of Raghu drinking from a pipe is present. This scene, apart from depicting the problem-solving skills of Elephants, like, the latter helps in highlighting their ability to learn or comprehend. Here, at first, Raghu is unable to master properly drinking from the pipe. Once Bellie demonstrates saying "Drink from

here”, he immediately follows her action or order. The above-described scene is critical for proving the claim that Elephants are cognitive animals as the ability to comprehend or learn, is a sign of cognition.

Additionally, they are beings with preferences. Raghu’s constant rejection of the millet ball and choice over the dried coconut and jaggery represent the same. The documentary also helps in depicting the ability of Elephants to understand commands. Raghu’s and Ammu’s reaction to the Bellie and Bomman’s commands such as run, walk, drink etc. clearly solidifies this. Lastly, the documentary also helps in capturing the cognitive ability of Elephants to retain memory. Raghu remembering Bomman even after being separated depicts the same. Bomman’s line on this is memorable, it is as follows, “Even today, he still comes running to me when I call.”.

All of the above discussed scenes help in deciphering elements that commonly highlight cognitive intelligence among Elephants such as their Problem-solving skills, social intelligence, long term memory, Self- awareness, Communication skills, Altruistic and playful nature. It also helps in bringing out their emotional Intelligence. Elephants are beings that possess emotional intelligence. Further, Elephant Whisperers will be examined to identify the five components of emotional intelligence proposed in Daniel Goleman’s theory, namely: self- awareness, self- regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

Self- awareness, on a holistic level can be interpreted as an understanding of one’s emotions, feelings, needs etc. *The Elephant Whisperers*, truly captures an Elephant’s self- awareness. Raghu’s and Ammu’s expression of their needs, preferences, emotions etc. highlights the same. When Raghu is separated from them, Ammu is devastated. She grieves about it, crying out to him as he leaves. She even refuses to eat for a while. In the wild, Elephants in mourning have been observed. It highlights the ability of Elephants to feel

happiness, sadness, excitement etc. In Addition, the documentary also captures their self-regulation. Self- regulation can be understood as regulating oneself and managing his/ her emotions. In the documentary, the initial few days after Ammu's arrival into the family; Raghu used to feel sad. He expressed possessive behaviours such as pushing Ammu away etc. Over time he became more self- regulatory, accepting Ammu as a member. Apart from these two aspects of emotional intelligence, the documentary also captures empathy among Elephants. Empathy is the process of understanding the emotions of others. The documentary clearly solidifies the empathetic nature of Elephants. Raghu and Ammu providing consoles to their fellow humans is an example of the same. The act of Raghu wiping off Bellie's tears as she recollects the losses of her life solidifies the claims.

In conclusion, the documentary *The Elephant Whisperers* helps in deciphering the field of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. The lines said by Bellie in the documentary that says, "Everything about him is like a human, except that he cannot talk." is notable. Yes, everything about them is "human". In other words, Elephants possess both emotional and cognitive intelligence, they are intelligent beings with emotions, needs and preferences.

Chapter-4

Conclusion

The world is witnessing dramatic changes threatening the existence of life. The species identified as a cause for such dramatic changes is the Homo- sapiens. Many Human activities have been identified as the sole cause of these changes.

Human activities not only have an impact on the environment but also other animals. Activities like poaching, forest encroachment, and habitat loss due to industrialization and urbanization are a few activities that have a significant impact on the lives of other species. Such activities even lead to extinction. Dodo bird, Steller's sea cow, and passenger pigeon are a few species whose extinction was due to human activities.

In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of human-wildlife conflicts in India. Considering the southern- Indian state of Kerala which has witnessed a significant rise in human-wildlife conflict over the past few years.

Kerala, famously known as the “God’s Own Country”, is a beautiful land with a unique geographical area including its picturesque backwaters, hilly terrains etc. Kerala is also a region known for its exotic wildlife. Particularly, Elephants, the state animal of Kerala.

Elephants are an integral part of Kerala’s culture. They are often part of religious festivities and other auspicious occasions. There are many Elephants beloved and popular among the Kerala population, a few of these names include Guruvayur Kesavan, Chirakkal Kalidasan, Puthupally Kesavan, and Pambady Rajan. To this list of popular Elephants, recently a few others have been added, but, unlike the latter, they are frightened upon. Ari Komban, Chakka Komban, and Thanneer Komban are a few belonging to the aforementioned list.

Ari Komban, Chakka Komban got their names due to their fondness for rice and jackfruit respectively. Thanneer Komban got his name because he had crossed a river to reach the mainland. All these wild tusked elephants are known for these peculiarities as well as for the damage they have caused to people. The reason for choosing Elephants as the research subject here is these instances. It attempts to provide a platform to perceive Elephants through a varied lens, as beings with cognition and emotional intelligence.

The question that the aforementioned issues raise is why is there such a rise in the number of human-wildlife conflicts. A main cause of human-wildlife conflict includes man-made, man-induced and natural factors. A few causes include encroachment into forest lands, deforestation, and habitat loss.

These factors that induce the animals to enter the mainland often get ignored. One solution to these conflicts could be having a better understanding of the environment and the wildlife population. This resulted in this dissertation, “Deciphering Elephant Cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”.

The dissertation, “Deciphering Elephant Cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, in the preceding chapters has deciphered instances that portray Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence to help humans understand Elephants better. These chapters provide a sequential comprehensive understanding of the fascinating world of Elephants through a medium easily accessible to everyone, film.

The dissertation focuses on one particular documentary that gained world recognition by winning the Academy Award for Best Documentary Short Film in the year 2023, *The Elephant Whisperers*.

This study acts as a guide to the world of Elephants through the lens of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence and equips its viewers with a basic understanding of

these concepts. The first chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept of cognitive and emotional intelligence. This chapter is followed by the main crust of the dissertation, the second chapter which deciphers instances that depict the emotional intelligence and cognitive ability of Elephants.

“Deciphering Elephant Cognition and Emotional Intelligence in The Elephant Whisperers”, by acting as a guide to propagating these concepts helps ordinary men gain a better understanding of the wildlife that surrounds them, specifically Elephants. It also helps in showcasing the role of media in promulgating information as well as promoting further studies on the subject matter using similar mediums.

This dissertation explains these topics by analysing the documentary by identifying characteristics that are commonly treated as signs of cognitive intelligence among Elephants. These characteristics identified have been inspired by scientific research works and real-life observations. Here, the following characteristics have been taken into consideration.

The characteristics considered are problem-solving skills, social intelligence, long term memory, Altruism, Self- awareness, Communication skills, and Playful nature. After identifying the characteristics, the documentary was critically analysed to elucidate instances that act as evidence to validate them. The aim of this dissertation was not just to highlight their cognitive intelligence but also to showcase their emotional intelligence. For this, Daniel Goleman’s theory was considered.

Goleman identified five components of emotional intelligence namely: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The documentary is analysed to illuminate instances that solidified these components. In conclusion, together all of these observations made from the documentary acted as evidence that support the cognitive and emotional intelligence of Elephants. The above-mentioned instances also

complement real-life observations made by scientists validating the observations provided. Apart from this, research articles on the topics acted as a medium for confirming the claims and observations made.

The Elephant Whisperers have been credited for their treatment and address of topics such as wildlife and forest conservation, human-animal coexistence and harmony with nature. An area that the documentary highlights that has not gained much recognition is how it acts as a medium to propagate to ordinary men, the concept of animal cognition and emotional intelligence. This work will depict how the documentary, *The Elephant Whisperers*, acts.

The Elephant Whisperers, by capturing the lives of two young Elephants provides an opportunity for research on the subject matter. The documentary, when critically observed, can provide various information regarding Elephants; and clear misconceptions about animal intelligence particularly that of Elephants. It highlights various facets of an Elephant.

Furthermore, the fact that *The Elephant Whisperers*, is a documentary itself is a factor increasing its credibility. John Grierson, the founder of the British documentary film movement defined 'Documentary', as "a creative treatment of actuality". Another well-known definition for the documentary is provided by Timothy Corrigan, who defined it as an "A nonfiction film about real events and people, often avoiding traditional narrative structures.". In simple words, a documentary is a representation of factual events, people, etc. in a creative way. In *The Elephant Whisperers*, a documentation of two Elephants and its care- takers take place. *The Elephant Whisperers*, being a documentary, enhances the credibility of the film as a portrayal of the real is made. Therefore, only the way of presentation and the narrative style varies. Therefore, making it a credible source.

To summarize, *The Elephant Whisperers* help in deciphering the concept of Elephant cognition and emotional intelligence. Recollecting a line said by Bellie, a few minutes into

the documentary is more than enough to make humans understand Elephants better. The lines are as follows, “I feel he understands everything.”. This line, though short, is loud enough. It captures how Elephants are conscious beings, who comprehend everything. This line and various other lines said on the course of the documentary, by the first couple to successfully raise two orphaned Elephants in South India; combined with the scenes facilitate understanding of Elephants. To conclude, the documentary short film, *The Elephant Whisperers*, acts as a door to understanding cognition and emotional intelligence possessed by Elephants.

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