

Review: Up for an Oscar, 'The Elephant Whisperers' is a heart-warming joy to watch



CHENNAI: Short documentary “The Elephant Whisperers” is in the running for the Best Documentary Short Film at the upcoming Academy Awards and after watching the Indian Netflix offering, you may well find yourself wondering how Academy voters are going to resist the extremely moving documentary about two adorable baby elephants and their warm-hearted caretakers, Bomman and Bellie.



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They live in the lush and delightfully picturesque terrain of Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. With its myriad colors, varied vegetation and fantastic species – captured vividly by Karan Thapliyal and others – the film kept me absorbed for all of its 41 minutes.

Helmed by Kartiki Gonsalves with narration penned by Priscilla Gonsalves, “The Elephant Whisperers” is crisp and refreshing. As one writer put it, it is this year’s “My Octopus Teacher” — the 2020 Oscar-winning documentary tracing the bond between a filmmaker and an octopus.

The core story here is about two elephant calves, Raghu and Ammu, who are treated like their own children by the couple.

When Raghu's mother is killed, forest officials hand the baby to Bomman and Bellie. There are some moving visuals of how the “parents” take care of the calf. There is more joy to come when another calf, Ammu, is also handed over the couple. The two babies hit it off, and it is lovely to watch them play and tussle with each other.

Scenes of Bomman giving the animals a bath and later playing football with them remain etched in my memory. The couple feed them just like they would their own children and the feeling of affection is captivating and wonderfully translated on screen.

As the environment becomes a buzzword in the media, it is especially touching when Bomman says we live off the forest, but we should also protect it. And despite the fact that Bellie's husband was killed by a tiger, she gets over her fear of the forest and begins to mingle with it. Later, when Bomman and Bellie get married, it seems like they have forged a perfect union not just with each other, but also with the rich forest that they call their home.
