

Why millennials prefer canines to kids

Some young people are trading the expense and stress of raising children for the easy and unconditional love of their pets

Sonam.Joshi@timesgroup.com

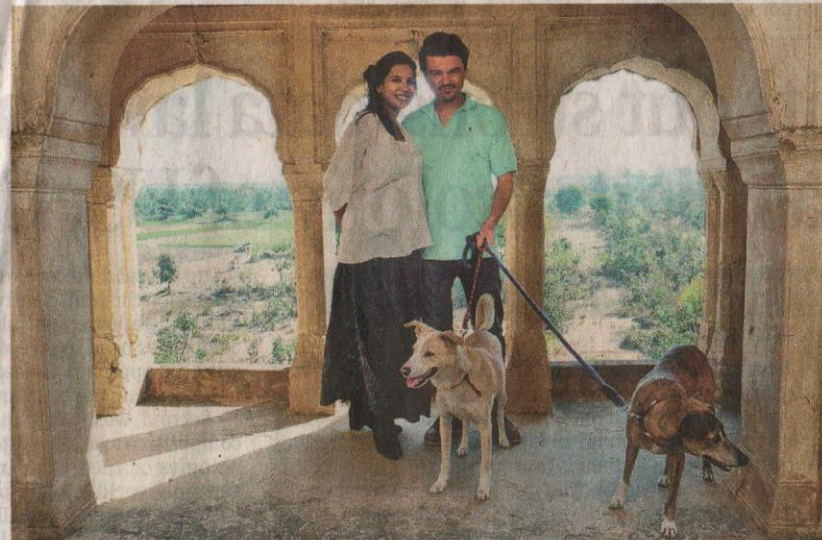
Soon after Nayani Tandon got her first dog, a labrador named Bobo in 2013, she decided to open a pet café in Delhi so that she could be with her pets round-the-clock. Tandon, who now has four dogs, says that they trump everyone and everything, including wedded bliss. "I don't want to get married and have kids because I have all the love I need," says Tandon, 30. "Besides, dogs are more faithful than men anyway."

Tandon isn't the only millennial happy to raise a canine instead of a child. Devika Arora, who has adopted four dogs with her husband in the last two years, is clear that she doesn't want kids.

"I am tired of telling my family that I am happy to have pets, and just don't feel the need to have a kid," says the 26-year-old. The working couple has full-time help just for their pets. They never travel for more than five days at a stretch, spend most of their free time with their canine companions, and even celebrate their monthly birthdays. "The six of us make the perfect family," says Arora.

Trisha Ghose, who lives with her two dogs in Goa, compares pet parenting to raising a baby. "When I meet anyone who wants to adopt a dog, I tell them it is a 15-year commitment, and it's like having a permanent baby. Children grow up and become self-sufficient but animals always depend on you. It is a huge investment of time and energy," says the 28-year-old wildlife conservationist. Ghose says she hasn't felt the need to have children "because I get more than enough love".

In a reflection of the times, several



ANIMAL FAMILIES: Divya Dugar and her husband Olivier often travel with their dogs on trains; (below) Devika Arora celebrates each of her four dogs' birthdays



companies, such as HarperCollins India, have begun offering 'pawternity' leave to employees when they adopt a pet or to tend to a sick pet.

Mumbai-based Shruti Roy, who runs the pet wellness centre House of Pawz, says she meets a lot of pet parents who say they don't want kids or will have to get permission from their pets to have children. "When people ask me if I have kids, I say I have two dogs," says Roy.

The trend was confirmed by a survey of 600 pet owners from

Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and other cities by e-commerce pet accessories portal Lana Paws. As many as 94% of respondents said their pet was like a family member or child to them. Nearly 60% respondents said they would break up if their partner didn't like their pet. "I was sure I wanted to marry someone who saw my dogs as I saw them. When my boyfriend proposed, I said I'm going to bring my two dogs with me. It's only when he agreed that I said yes," says Lana Paws founder Vidha Shukla, 31.

**LOVE ME,
LOVE MY DOG**

56% spend more than three hours a day with their pet

60% would break up if their partner didn't like their pet

76% celebrate their pet's birthday

80% buy gifts for their pets without any occasion

Source: LanaPaws survey

Journalist Divya Dugar and her husband travel with their pets, sharing pictures of their train journeys on Instagram, to encourage their 5,000-plus followers to do the same. Dugar, who calls herself the mother of three dogs, says it is difficult for her to explain her emotional commitment to her furry family to others. "People say I obsess over dogs because I don't have kids."

Some pet parents do go overboard, splurging on pet clothes that may make them uncomfortable or over feeding them. Dog trainer Namratha Rao says it is important to have some ground rules. "One of the biggest dangers is that we forget that a dog is a dog. Pet parents should acknowledge that dogs are not human, and don't have the same complexity of emotion," Rao says.