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Are we breeding our dogs to extinction?

We have come a long way from the 'original dog' that first roamed the planet, hunting in packs and adopting man's camps as easy food source as they shared the discarded scraps with the vultures and other scavengers. Man tolerated the scavenging canines because they found dogs useful as hunting mates and waste disposal units, the smell of rotting meat and refuse was obnoxious and the scavenging dogs took care of most of this problem. All dogs still seem to maintain this inherent characteristic today as you see your newly groomed aristocratic pooch overturn the smelly garbage bin and devour the rotting contents. The other important role canines serve are that of early warning sentries, to alert the camps of approaching strangers and larger predators.

The first pet

A wandering orphaned puppy was adopted by one of man's child and the puppy was reared and tamed, the dog grew up and helped man in his hunt and the rest of the storybecomes history.

Dog breeds or Frankendog?

Man used to select dogs with characteristics needed for the work he wanted done- good noses for tracking, long legs for chasing prey, strong muscles and jaws for grappling prey, intelligence for herding and guarding livestock and so on – and this was the basis of the different breeds in the beginning. With successive generations over the centuries, the role of the dog has evolved and today, majority of dogs are kept primarily for their companionship.

Man being the adventurer he is, got bored with his companion and started tinkering with the way the dog looked; He wanted other man to notice his pooch! He developed the '*Frankendog*'

If "Man's best friend" knew what man had done to make his life uncomfortable, he would go and find another friend!

By playing his genetic games and squashing and squashing dogs into new shapes called breeds, the curse of the pedigree dog surfaced – Congenital defects.

Donna Bruhl in her paper wrote that congenital defects are defined as an inherited condition which inhibits the normal functioning and development of a part , and so prevents an animal from leading a normal life

It is important to realize that in the beginning, all exotic breeds of dogs start off as mutations and accidents and capitalizing on these characteristics through selective breeding, we now have the current potpourri of pedigrees that range from all different colors and shapes, the long to the short, the tall to the squat and the teacup to the giant! What next?

What possessed man to take this dog from the wild and breed them into the bizarre shapes and sizes? I can only guess, but I do know that the dogs had no say. But despite the array of dog breeds, the indomitable characteristics that make all dogs lovable and loyal remain mostly unchanged!

Today, our small planet is being crowded with an exhaustive string of kennel clubs, breed clubs, working dog clubs, gun dog clubs, toy dog clubs, special need clubs, special special dog clubs, dog owners club and just about any other group that relate to dogs!

Congenital and inherited diseases

Inherited diseases are diseases inscribed into the genetic makeup of the individual and passed from generation to generation. Congenital diseases are diseases that show up at birth but not all congenital diseases are inherited e.g conjoined twins. The unfortunate reality is that nearly all the congenital defects we see in dogs are also inherited.

With each successive generation, the pedigreed dog gets weaker as breeders started 'line breeding' or more correctly but uglier description – 'inbreeding'. Most breeders were not concerned with the inside working mechanisms or even aware of it, as looks became everything. In any case, there was no way to assess the working mechanisms until it breaks down but because large sums of money and personal pride are involved, we do not hear much of the puppy that did not fit the bill – it got trashed with the trash and the play continues. Even the well meaning and honorable breeder inadvertently become part of the problem.

Many congenital problems started appearing and unfortunately, many superficial desirable characteristics are also linked to genetic defects (not to forget that most breeds are actually mutations anyway!). The result – most dogs bred today are bred for looks rather than for their survival, dogs are hardly dogs anymore. Their physical characteristics have been so exaggerated that the brains and comfort of the dogs have severely suffered. Some dogs look like they have run into a parked bus and squashed their faces, and have malformed teeth and breathing difficulties. Others have eyes that pop out of their sockets if eyelids are pulled back. Some can hardly walk or even get up as they get older; and others limp their whole life and suffer pain.

A lesser diagnosed but prevalent problem afflicting most of our large and small pedigrees is Endocrine-Immune Dysfunction. It is the basis behind many common ailments. This problem arises primarily out of the inadequate ability of the dog's endocrine system to tackle stress. The result is a derailed immune regulation-giving rise to allergies, asthma, irritable bowel disease, dermatitis, epilepsy and eventually cancer.

Other severe congenital conditions afflicting:

Large breeds and working dogs include hip and elbow dysplasia, chronic ear and skin problem, abnormal temperament, disco-spondylosis, cancer susceptibility

Small and toy breeds suffer early blindness, long soft palate and collapsing trachea, Porto-systemic shunts, deafness, congenital cataracts, patella luxation, entropion, uterine inertia, difficult temperaments, spinal disc disease, heart disease, just to name a few.

Until buyers are aware that these defects do exist, and breeders come out in the open and discuss how to best eradicate congenital defects in their breeds, our breeds are doomed to degenerate into poor neurotic physical specimens.

Conclusion

Is it too late for reversal? No but there is no global will to change just like man's approach to the decay of our environment. Result - if there is increased competition for food in our planet in the coming decades, most of our dogs will not survive if left to their own. Maybe the Darwinian selection of the fitter will return the dog back to the original canine and the cycle of life starts all over again. Who knows? But the relief in my mind is that the indomitable characteristic of the dog will never change - the loyalty, long suffering, sensitivity and utter selflessness. Like Mary Shelly's Frankenstein, the creator will still be worshipped as the master and no amount of pain or suffering will strain this relationship. Good luck to our canine friends, maybe in the next life cycle, they may be wiser in choosing some other species to befriend!