

Farmers real heroes of 70-year-old nation



Bharati Chaturvedi

■ letters@hindustantimes.com

India will be a 70-year old nation-state tomorrow. Who are our heroes? We've been taught about freedom fighters, statespersons, writers and thinkers who shaped India.

Yet, who would you call a hero in 2017? I acknowledge the role of the Indian soldier, but today, I'd like to salute India's farmers.

Why would anyone want to call a farmer India's hero on its 70th? Most obviously, because they have fed us substantially, or we 'd spend even more forex importing pulses and the like.

Second, because without farmers, we would lose many indigenous types of Indian food and knowledge. How many types of rice and dal have you eaten? I can

bet not even 10% of the nearly 700 varieties of rice and not more than 20% of the approximately 90 dal types in India. They are grown, preserved and eaten in tiny pockets by local farmers-precious bio-diversity that is mostly forgotten. In some cases, they've even gone extinct as farmers give up in frustration.

A third reason is their resilience-for the thousands of farmers' suicides, lakhs others believe in a better India and harvest nature. Our agricultural policies haven't made small farmers, ie, 70% of farmers, economically robust. Yet, they work nature, sometimes with no other choice. They are heroes because they have ploughed their way through desperation and kept India intact. We must acknowledge this and turn around agriculture in favour of this population. It's time to recall a slogan from India's youth-Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan.

(The author is founder and director, Chintan Environmental Research and Action Group)