Injured forest official vows to protect land

Telangana woman officer wants govt. to take a clear stand on forest clearings

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As the trauma of a mob attacking her four days back wanes, Chole Anitha, Kagaznagar Forest Range Officer (FRO), is waiting for her injuries to heal before she reports back to duty at the Kagaznagar Forest Division in the Kumram Bheem Asifabad district.

“I will not stop protecting forests or forest land just because of the June 30 incident,” she told The Hindu at her home in Kowta (K) village in the Sonala mandal, on Wednesday, where she returned home after being discharged from a hospital in Hyderabad on Tuesday evening.

The 2013 batch FRO was attacked by villagers of Sarasala while leading a contingent of Forest Department personnel for taking up plantation on a 20 hectare piece of degraded forest as part of compensatory afforestation efforts. The incident of a woman officer being attacked viciously by villagers led by the brother of a local MLA grabbed national attention.

“No, I do not want any police protection. As I belong to a uniformed service, I should be able to take care of myself,” Ms. Anitha, who wishes to return to duty at the same location, stated.

Her husband, Manik Rao Kendre, and the entire Vanjari community in the erstwhile united Adilabad district, are supportive of her decision to return. “If we back out, the assailants will feel victorious,” an elder of the community said.

On the subject of forest clearings, some of which may be considered as those caused by podu or shifting cultivation, but most encroached by non-tribals, Ms. Anitha said, “The government should take a clear stand so that those who are working sincerely for the cause of environmental protection and safeguarding public property can go about their duties with greater clarity.”