

Story 10: "From Forest to Flag" – The Journey of Vishwas Tudu (IAS, AIR 328)

(Inspired by real tribal aspirants like Vishwas Tudu and others, merged into a symbolic story)

In the dense Sal forests of Mayurbhanj, Odisha — where elephants still wander freely and nights are darker than ink — a boy once sat beneath a Mahua tree, copying English alphabets on a torn newspaper with coal.

His name was Vishwas Tudu. A child of the Santhal tribe, born to parents who had never seen a school, never held a currency note beyond ₹100, and never believed the government would come for them — unless to take their land.

His father was a marginal farmer, and his mother collected firewood. Electricity was rare. A single lantern lit their home, and it was often saved for the sick, not the studious. They lived in a kaccha hut, with walls made of mud and dreams that barely dared to breathe.

His first spark came when he saw a helicopter land in their village. The district collector had come to inspect a broken dam. Everyone gathered. The collector, in white shirt and black shoes, stepped out, and the entire tribal panchayat fell silent.

Vishwas watched him like a scene from another planet.

That night, he asked his father,

“Why does everyone respect him?”

His father replied,

“Because he listens. When he speaks, even cities obey.”

That was enough.

That night, a seed was planted in the red soil of Odisha — one that would grow into a rebellion of purpose.

But rebellion has a price.

Vishwas had to walk 8 km barefoot to reach his school. He studied under a tree. Teachers came once a week. The mid-day meal was his only food on most days. Yet he topped his class every year.

In Class 9, he got his first book in English — a discarded grammar guide from a railway station. He didn't understand half the words. So he taught himself English using Doordarshan news, old radio broadcasts, and street hoardings.

He graduated with a BA in Political Science from a local college, sleeping on floors, eating at temples, and giving tuitions to other tribal students.

And then... came the dream: UPSC.

Everyone laughed. "No tribal has ever made it from here. You think Delhi is waiting for you?"

But he had one thing they didn't — faith.

He moved to Bhubaneswar with borrowed money. Slept in a Gurudwara. Studied in libraries by day and washed dishes at a dhaba by night. He used free Wi-Fi at railway stations to download syllabus PDFs. He watched toppers' videos without headphones — listening with full concentration, blocking out noise.

His first attempt? Failed prelims by 1 mark.

Second attempt? Cleared prelims, failed mains.

Third attempt? Got to the interview. But he couldn't answer one question on IR.

Result: Not selected.

He nearly gave up.

Then one day, during a tribal awareness camp he had organized to teach school kids about their rights, an elderly Adivasi woman touched his hand and said,

"You are already our officer, beta. The government may not know it yet."

That night, he cried. Then rose.

Fourth attempt.

He studied not with pressure — but with peace. His essays flowed like folk tales. His Ethics paper was full of tribal proverbs. His interview? He spoke of water scarcity in his village with such passion that one panelist had tears in their eyes.

And then the list came.

AIR 328. Vishwas Tudu. IAS.



His village celebrated like a festival. The forest echoed with drums. The boy who once borrowed pens from postmen was now going to LBSNAA.

Today, he serves in a tribal-dominated district, building schools where none stood before, digitizing tribal land records, promoting local languages, and reviving dying tribal art forms. And when he wears the badge, he doesn't just represent a service. He represents history correcting itself.

From firewood to file work,
From Mahua leaves to mission reports,
From silenced roots to powerful reforms —
Vishwas didn't just become an IAS officer. He became a forest flame.