

Teacher who knows mothers must study

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Siliguri: On Saturdays, when the school bell falls silent at Tarabari FP School in Islampur, North Dina-
jpur, another classroom comes alive nearby.

There are no uniforms or blackboards here. Just a veranda, a few notebooks and pencils, and mothers learning to read and write.

For the past year, headmaster Sushanta Nandi has been turning his Saturday afternoons into lessons for the mothers of his school's students through his "Mayeder Pathshala (Mothers' School)".

Nandi said the idea of an informal school for mothers grew from something he had observed over years of teaching: a child's first school is the home, and the first teacher is the mother.

But several mothers in Tarabari village were illiterate or barely literate because of poverty, household responsibilities, or simply a lack of opportunity.

"I used to feel sad seeing these mothers. I felt that if I could do something small to help them come out of the darkness, I should try," Nandi said. "Then, this journey started."

On Monday, the first day of the fourth edition of IIHM Presents The Telegraph School Awards for Excellence 2026 North



Sushanta Nandi (left), the headmaster of Tarabari FP School, Islampur, with some of the mothers he has taught to read and write, at the TTEF awards in Siliguri on Monday.

Picture by Passang Yolmo

Bengal, in association with The Bhawanipur Education Society College and PCM Group & powered by Techno India Group and Sister Nivedita University, at Birla Divya Jyoti School Auditorium in Siliguri, this school was among those honoured. Along with Nandi, some of these mothers walked up to the stage, proudly carrying slates in their hands, which bore messages like "Ami pori" (I can read) and "Ami likhi" (I can write). The two-day event ended on Tuesday.

Only five mothers initially joined, but the number has risen to 40 since then, Nandi said.

Nandi's lessons comprise the Bengali alphabet, word formation, handwriting, basic arithmetic and reading. He provides notebooks, pens, pencils, slates and even arranges snacks for the learners. Once a month, the learners sit for a test. Those who do well receive small prizes. Nandi gives extra attention to those who need more help.

Tarabari is changing. Kalo Bibi, a mother and one of Nandi's students, said: "With our children, we can also now read and write. We will never stop learning."