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true: criminals had found a way of changing IMEI numbers. Using devices called "flashers", available for as less as ₹10,000, those experienced in mobile phone repair would erase a phone's IMEI number and replace it with a new one. As time passed, even flasher devices went extinct. Today, you can simply connect a phone to a computer and use a flasher software, easily available on the internet. A simple Google search reveals scores of tutorials, both text and video, on how to use the flasher software, all of which, ironically, come with a disclaimer saying, "it may be illegal to do this in your country".

Even the clientele of mobile phone thieves has changed. While earlier they would sell the phones to retailers, who would in turn sell them as second-hand phones, now, the racket has gone international.

**38,667**
**No. of stolen handsets disabled through the Central Equipment Identity Register project**

In an investigation conducted in August last year, the Trombay police recovered 131 stolen phones and found transactions amounting to ₹2 crore over two years in the bank account of one of the arrested accused

Waychal's team discovered this while trying to track down two accused in the case, who are still wanted. These two men would pick up the mobile phones from Farha and Sahil, and smuggle them across the border into countries like Bangladesh and Nepal, where they would be injected back into the open market. Once the phones are out of India's jurisdiction, recovering them becomes next to impossible, and this is something that mobile phone thieves seem to have realised.

The Crime Branch's Unit VI, too, uncovered this aspect when they were probing a similar case last year. When one of their constables received a tip off about a cross-border mobile phone racket, an investigation was initiated and the Unit VI went on to arrest 21 people over a period of two months.

"The accused had a tie-up with agents based at the Nepal and Bangladesh borders. These agents have a massive racket, primarily helping criminals wanted in India to slip into Nepal or Bangladesh to lie low until matters cool down. These same agents would pick up consignments of stolen phones and deliver them across the border," says a Crime Branch officer who was part of the investigation.

**On a daily basis, the CEIR team makes a log of the blocked devices. Further, if someone inserts a new SIM card into the device to try and use it, the SIM card company concerned immediately gets an alert, along with the location of the device. This is forwarded to the police in real time, which increases the chances of the recovering the device and arresting the accused**

The smuggling process, too, is quick. In one instance, the police started tracing a phone that was reported stolen in Mumbra. The same day, it travelled to Tilak Nagar and then to Vashi, where it was switched off. When it was switched on the next morning, it was in Bangladesh.

While phones in pristine or decent condition fetch a good price in the black market, even damaged phones are in high demand for one simple reason: their IMEI numbers. If a phone is too damaged to be resold, its IMEI number is noted down and entered into a database, after which it is stripped for parts. The database is used every time the gangs need a new IMEI number to assign to a stolen phone after its original one is 'flashed' out.

"The good news," an officer says, "is that if every phone, damaged or not, is reported stolen through CEIR, the gangs will eventually run out of IMEI numbers to use. What we are doing is hitting them where it hurts. If they can't sell the phones, what is the point of stealing them?"

The only question that the police haven't been able to find an answer to, yet, is why phones are called kaunwas. "Even we were curious about the origins. While interrogating some recently arrested accused, we learnt that policemen, earlier called 'mamu' are now known as 'hathi' or elephant. Nobody seems to know why!" smiles Waychal.

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# Finding her voice

**A new collection of poems takes creative licenses while adhering to biographical facts to enable India's first female physician Anandibai Joshi to tell her own story**

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY

ONE might find this silly, but each time I started a poem in this collection, I would look up at the sky and take Anandibai's permission, asking her "what would you like me to say?" poet and writer Shikha Malaviya tells us in an email interview about her new collection of persona poems Anandibai Joshee: A Life in Poems (HarperCollins India, ₹399). The book, on India's first female physician and the first Indian woman to travel to the United States in 1883 to study medicine, tells Anandibai's story through her own imagined voice, setting it apart from previous work on her life, which has often viewed her through the limiting narrative of her husband as her saviour and guide. As Malaviya writes in her preface to the book, "[by] telling Anandibai's story through poems in her own voice, my hope is to not only restore Anandibai's agency and give her story back to her, but to also highlight her inner strength, determination, sharp intellect, and desire to help other women".

Malaviya also writes in her preface about the racism she experienced as a child growing up in Minnesota in the early '80s and her need to find her history reflected in her surroundings. It was this search for a foremother that ultimately led her to Anandibai. "The writing of this book has made me realise that we can heal our own lack of history and roots by excavating life stories and bringing them to the forefront," she tells us.

At the same time, as an Indo-American with experiences of living both in India and the US, it was also a sense of shared history and struggle that helped forge Malaviya's personal connection with her subject. "It was shocking to me that I could feel this connection [with her] despite us belonging to different centuries. My heart ached with recognition in seeing Anandibai's tussle between traditional expectations and her own beliefs, which were, in many ways, radical," notes the poet. She finds echoes of her own experiences in Anandibai's and mentions how her Indian identity too was reinforced, while she was constantly cautioned about becoming "westernised". She describes how she embraced tradition in her own life but never, like her ancestor, let go of her dream. "Writing poetry is and always will be my radical act," Malaviya insists.

Through poems, titled A Different Kind of Arithmetic, where Anandibai even as a child is made acutely aware of the divide that exists between the sexes ('Before I could count properly on my fingers/Ek don teen char, I learned division/the haveli halved into two sections/the mardana and zenana') and 'Loss: An Invocation' where she resolves to become a doctor ('...and through your loss I find purpose/my son with no name birthing a dream/and I volunteer myself to my countrywomen/as I take the oath of Hippocrates...'), Malaviya explores Anandibai's inner thoughts and feelings as it takes readers through the more well-known episodes of her life.

Malaviya's formal structuring of her verse too lends as much meaning as do her usage of words. "[When] you are telling a life story, different forms of poetry can lend more weight to all the twists and turns," she admits. "Anandibai lived in an age where language was quite formal, measured, and elegant. Forms such as sonnets, pantoums, ghazals and couplets lend to that while providing, in this case, a certain elegiac rhythm. I'm a very visual writer and in poems such as 'Nāmkaran,' where Anandibai is named after the Yamuna river, it felt natural for the words to take on the shape of a river," she explains. Again, a poem called Consumption which underscores the brutality Anandibai faced at the hands of her husband "is shaped like a sickle". "I wanted the violence of the poem to be conveyed not just through words, but also to foreshadow how consumption, which is another word for tuberculosis, would eventually cut her down," says Malaviya. "Through the writing of this book, I came to respect the function of form much more and realised that within form itself, there is much room to experiment."

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↑ Anandi Gopal Joshi, Japanese doctor Kei Okami and Syrian doctor Sabat Islambooly, each in native dress, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1886. All three graduated from the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania and were the first women from their respective countries to graduate from a western university. In her book, Malaviya writes that despite echoing exoticism, the photograph exudes a power "that seemed to turn the notion of empire on its head" and hints at "an allyship and sisterhood that went beyond the church and state". PIC/GETTY IMAGES

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**Shikha Malviya**

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