

## **Shadows Over Sydney**

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Shadows Over Sydney  
Introduction  
Chapter 1: Sumitri  
Chapter 2: Puju  
Chapter 3: Rashmi Bongji  
Chapter 4: Komal Gupta  
Chapter 5: Pallavi  
Chapter 6: Priya Sharma aka Ms. Aussie  
Chapter 7: Priyanka  
Chapter 8: Khushboo  
Chapter 9: Rohini  
The Investigation  
Conclusion

### **Introduction**

In the deeply bruised and magnificently gilded twilight of a sprawling harbour city that wore its historical contradictions exactly like a string of heavy, stolen pearls upon a scarred, weathered throat, Sydney unfolded each evening as both a radiant promise and a dark, heavily erased palimpsest. The air at this transitional hour was always thick with a complex, dizzying perfume: the sharp, biting tang of diesel exhaust from the massive, churning ferries, the bitter and ancient scent of deep ocean salt, and the sweet, cloying aroma of caramelized nuts drifting heavily from the brightly lit tourist carts lining Circular Quay. The Sydney Opera House, that

great, gleaming white lotus of human ambition rising aggressively from the dark waters of Bennelong Point, caught the dying, blood-orange rays of the evening sun and miraculously transformed the skyline into something at once profoundly sacred and deeply, existentially unsettling.

*Shadows Over Sydney.* The very title hovered invisibly, hanging like thick, sweet incense smoke—the unmistakable scent of pure chandan and burning camphor—above the complex, intertwined lives of nine specific women. These were women who had bravely crossed vast, unforgiving oceans and multiple time zones seeking fresh, fertile soil to plant their families, only to tragically find ancient, unpaid colonial debts waiting patiently for them beneath the blinding, synthetic festival lights of their adopted home.

They were the quiet, uncelebrated architects of western Sydney's beating, desi heartlands, from the bustling, spice-scented avenues of Parramatta to the quiet, tree-lined residential stretches of Cowper Street in Granville. They were Sumitri, Puju, Rashmi Bongi, Komal Gupta, Pallavi, Priya Sharma—known affectionately and fiercely in defiant local circles as Ms. Aussie—Priyanka, Khushboo, and finally, Rohini. They were dedicated housewives and working mothers whose ordinary days were rich, vibrant tapestries woven with bright yellow, turmeric-stained fingers, the echoing, high-pitched laughter of children bouncing sharply off thin suburban walls, and the particular, heavy loneliness of immigrant women who gracefully balanced the chanting of ancient, protective ancestral mantras with the relentless, percussive rhythms of modern Australian mortgage payments.

Their husbands, men worn down by the grinding machinery of a new world, carried the highly visible, heavy burdens of endless visa applications and exhausting night shifts under flickering fluorescent

lights, while these nine women fiercely tended the invisible, roaring hearth of cultural continuity. They spoke daily in beautiful, hybrid tongues, mixing the clipped vowels of English with the rolling, musical cadences of Hindi and Bengali, and they dreamed vividly in hybrid, impossible colours. And on nine consecutive, freezing nights of the Vivid Sydney festival, wrapped in thick coats and brightly coloured silk dupattas, they voluntarily stepped into the luminous, electric maw of the Opera House forecourt exactly as devoted pilgrims walking toward a blinding wonder.

Absolutely no one, not even the most cynical detective nor the most attuned spiritualist, could have ever foreseen the clinical, terrifying precision of their vanishing. The horrific murders—if murders they could even be accurately called in a court of law—left behind absolutely no conventional biological trace: there was no stray DNA left on the concrete, no bloody footprints leading away into the shadows, and no fleeting, blurry shadow captured by the city's vast, vigilant network of security eyes. The only physical remnants were the impossible, scorched glyphs seared into the earth. It was not a violent, physical tearing away from the world, but rather a profound, terrifyingly silent existential transition. It mirrored the harrowing, clinical moment in a hushed medical ward when a patient effortlessly, irreversibly slips from the warm, chaotic grip of life directly into the cold, absolute stillness of death.

There were only their cold, unblemished bodies, gently returned to the freezing harbour precinct as the nights surrendered to the dawn, left entirely unmarked save for the terrifying brands they bore. Their skin, pale as polished marble, was horrifically inscribed with glowing, jagged Vedic curses that were significantly older than the massive sandstone blocks buried deep beneath the iconic harbour bridge. These glowing glyphs smelled faintly of scorched

flesh and ozone, serving as undeniable symbols of violently obstructed dharma, of ancient, fractured lineages, and of brutally silenced historical testimonies.

The festival's thumping, electric dream—a dizzying onslaught of blinding lasers, shifting neon geometric patterns, and bone-rattling synthetic bass—rapidly became the grand, terrible stage for something primordial. A vengeful, reincarnated soul had risen from the crushing depths, desperately seeking a bloody accounting for brutal colonial-era wrongs that modern history had politely, efficiently filed away in dusty, forgotten archives.

This narrative is not merely a standard, procedural tale of urban crime to be solved with fingerprint dust and luminol. It is the profound, heartbreaking story of a massive, arrogant city forcefully confronting its own dark, distorted reflection in the murky, churning water. It is the deeply personal story of an Indian expat detective, Inspector Arjun Rao, a man violently torn between the cold, rational scalpel of modern forensic reason and the deep, undeniable, roaring pulse of his inherited blood. It is the story of a gifted, local psychic, Vibha Jha, who could accurately read the harbour's shifting, violent moods exactly as her ancestors read sacred palm leaves. Together, in the freezing wind, they would be forced to walk the rapidly narrowing, treacherous path between cynical skepticism and absolute spiritual surrender, waiting until the buried past and the oblivious present violently collided in a massive, harbour-side reckoning where the blinding festival light itself bore ultimate, irrefutable witness.

Sydney, ever the consummate, desperate performer, blazed on with absolute indifference. Vivid's deafening colours violently painted the massive architectural shells in toxic sapphire, blinding magenta, and deep saffron, projecting massive, wheeling galaxies exactly where

once only the quiet, natural waves had respectfully spoken to the shore. Yet, buried deeply beneath the deafening spectacle and the smell of spilled beer and fried food, the ancient shadows rapidly lengthened. Nine beautiful women. Nine agonizing nights. Nine profound, echoing absences that would forcefully compel a highly reluctant, modern empire of deliberate forgetting to finally, painfully remember its sins.

The Opera House stood eternal and immovable, its massive, white curves straining upward toward the pitch-black sky exactly like desperate, giant hands raised simultaneously in both begging supplication and furious, undeniable accusation. And far away, in the quiet, brick-lined terraces of Parramatta and Granville, the sweet, heavy incense burned much longer into the freezing nights, the smoke rising like silent prayers, exactly as if the desperate living could somehow forcefully call the unjustly lost back across the impenetrable, medical veil of death.

This terrifying story begins softly, with the gentle placement of a single, vibrant orange marigold petal upon freezing, cold stone, and it ultimately ends exactly where all true, enduring stories must end—in the blinding, highly luminous recognition that true, cosmic justice is absolutely not the erasure of the past, but the deeply painful, entirely necessary act of finally opening one's eyes and seeing.

## **Chapter 1: Sumitri**

In the terraced quiet of Parramatta, where jacaranda blossoms fell like violet regrets upon the meticulously manicured suburban lawns, Sumitri moved through her days with the patient, deliberate grace of one who had transplanted her roots across vast and unforgiving oceans. The evening air in their home was heavy with the rich,