

# Akram Khan

## Background & Upbringing

Full Name: Akram Khan MBE

Date of Birth: 29 July 1974

Heritage: British Bangladeshi, born in Wimbledon, London

Early Life: Grew up between traditional Bangladeshi culture and Western London life, influencing his dual-identity focus.

Early Training: Began Kathak at age 7 under Pratap Pawar; performed in Peter Brook's \*Mahabharata\* at age 13.

Academic Training: Studied at De Montfort University and Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD).

Company Formation: Founded Akram Khan Company (2000) with producer Farooq Chaudhry.

## Dance Style & Influences

- Fusion of Forms – Integrates Kathak and contemporary dance techniques.
- Cultural Duality – Explores East/West, tradition/modernity, and identity/belonging.
- Rhythmic Complexity – Use of tatkar (footwork) and bols (spoken rhythm).
- Expressivity – Incorporates abhinaya (expression/gesture).
- Collaborative Process – Works with musicians, visual artists, and writers.
- Themes – Identity, faith, migration, homeland, transformation.

## Funding & Production Features

- Akram Khan Company – Small independent company supported by Arts Council England (NPO).
- Co-Production Model – Collaborates with Sadler's Wells, Théâtre de la Ville (Paris), and others.
- Producer Role – Farooq Chaudhry manages financial/strategic planning.
- Touring – International reach sustains company funding.
- Education/Outreach – Workshops and cross-cultural artist development.

## Overall Stylistic & Thematic Traits

Movement Style: Fusion of Kathak (precision, rhythm, storytelling) and contemporary (fluid, grounded).

Themes: Identity, belonging, hybridity, spirituality, human connection.

Music: Combination of live and recorded, East-West blend (Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook).

Technology: Multimedia, animation, and projection enhance narrative.

Choreographic Devices: Motif development, repetition, contrast, call-and-response, gesture integration.

## **Desh (2011)**

Meaning: “Homeland” in Bengali.

Concept: Personal solo about identity and heritage; explores father-son relationship and belonging.

Structure: Non-linear storytelling with memories, myths, and autobiography.

Style: Mix of Kathak, theatre, and multimedia (animation, projection).

Collaborators: Tim Yip (visual design), YeastCulture (animation), Karthika Naïr (text), Jocelyn Pook (music).

Themes: Cultural identity, diaspora, imagination, childhood.

Funding: Supported by Arts Council England and Sadler’s Wells co-production.

## **Zero Degrees (2005)**

Collaborators: Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Nitin Sawhney, Kiran Desai, Antony Gormley.

Concept: Crossing borders – physical and cultural. “Zero degrees” = neutral identity space.

Themes: Dual heritage, belonging, unity/division.

Movement: Duets, mirroring, contrast between Kathak and contemporary styles.

Design: Gormley’s life-sized casts used as metaphors for life and death.

Music: Global fusion by Nitin Sawhney.

Production: Co-produced by Sadler’s Wells and international partners.

## **Sacred Monsters (2006)**

Collaborators: Sylvie Guillem, Dominique Hervieu (director).

Concept: Meeting of classical traditions (Kathak and Ballet); explores the vulnerability of artists.

Themes: Fame, perfection, discipline, identity, cultural dialogue.

Style: Conversational duet with spoken text, humour, and improvisation.

Music/Design: Live musicians, minimalist lighting, focus on performer equality.

Funding: Supported by Sadler’s Wells and international co-producers.

## **Analytical Summary**

Akram Khan’s work bridges cultures and redefines dance identity. His choreography reflects the tension between tradition and innovation, celebrating hybrid identity as a creative strength. His collaborations expand the global language of dance and foster intercultural understanding through rhythm, storytelling, and emotion.