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MAMI Film Festival Pays Tribute to Legendary Film Critic Derek Malcolm

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[Mumbai, India](#)

The Jio MAMI Film Festival honoured the acclaimed international film critic Derek Malcolm at the festival. Here who he was to me.

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Renowned film critic Derek Malcolm passed away earlier this year. (Pic: X/@markcousinsfilm)

The Jio Mami Mumbai Film Festival paid a tribute to legendary film critic Derek Malcolm. One of the most endearing images I have of Derek is of him sunning just outside Hotel Belvedere on the Lido, a pretty, pretty island off mainland Venice. He would be sipping a drink with the afternoon sun fiercely beating down on him. I would pull up a chair and sit with him to talk about the movies he had seen that day at the Venice Film Festival. His sense of humour, typically British, was just amazing. And his favourite expression, "Oh, bloody hell", sounded more like a great joke than anything else. He had no malice whatsoever, and had the kindest of words for the most terrible of movies. Not that he did not call a spade a spade.

Born on May 12, 1932, in England, Derek Malcolm was 91 when he passed away on July 15 this year. Survived by his wife Sarah Gristwood and daughter Jackie from his first marriage to Barbara Ibbott, that ended in 1966, Derek was a great lover of Indian cinema, a staunch admirer of Shyam Benegal, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Ketan Mehta and Mrinal Sen among others — who were in the forefront of creating a kind of cinema that was rooted in realism.

One of the longest serving critics of The Guardian from 1971 to 1997 followed by a stint at the London's Evening Standard from 2003 to 2015, he was visibly upset when he found himself without a platform. But he soon found others, and wrote with the same kind of tempered passion that one saw in his early years.

TRENDING VIDEOS

Distantly connected to the British royalty, he dabbled with other professions before he put his pen to paper. Imagine him being a jockey! Till he got fed up of that. And I think he got tired of other things before he became a movie critic. He stayed there, and despite his luminous array of experience, he was so humble that it often

moved me.

In fact, he preferred to call himself a reviewer rather than a critic, having stepped into the arena when judgemental writers were quitting. Subtle but witty, his writings were a delight to read, and he put his experience as a critic, nay reviewer, to great use when he became the Director of the British Film Institute's London Film Festival for three decisive years in the 1980s. It became lively, more inclusive and was filled with novelties: surprise screenings and shows outside London.

There was one particular incident I recall which he elaborated with relish and a wink. It was during the International Film Festival of India which was held that year in Calcutta (Those days, the event travelled from city to city). "I was fed up of being disturbed by directors who wanted their movies to be played in the London Film Festival. They would knock at my door at unearthly hours. Once I opened the door and stood in the buff! They ran away and never bothered me again," he told me. Well, Derek was gutsy all right.

Here is another telling example. In his 2003 memoir, *Family Secrets*, he wrote how his father Lieutenant Douglas Malcolm shot and killed his wife, Dorothy's lover. Malcolm became the first man in British legal history to be acquitted! Despite the scandal it created, Dorothy and Douglas remained married.

That is Derek for you, and I would never forget his words every time we met and parted, "Do not be naughty"! I could merely smile.

About the Author

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