

**Locarno, Cinema Kursaal****18:15****Friday, 18 February 2022****Little Women 2019**

135 minutes

Directed by **Greta Gerwig**

Starring: Saoirse Ronan, Emma Stone, Meryl Streep

In the years after the Civil War, Jo March (Saoirse Ronan) lives in New York City and makes her living as a writer while her sister Amy March (Florence Pugh) is in Paris with their affluent Aunt March (Meryl Streep) studying painting. Amy has a chance encounter with Theodore "Laurie" Laurence (Timothée Chalamet), a childhood crush, who proposed to Jo but was ultimately rejected. Their oldest sibling, Meg (Emma Watson) is married to a schoolteacher. The news of their talented and shy sister Beth's (Eliza Scanlen) devastating illness brings the family back together.

Seven years earlier, in Concord, Massachusetts, with their father away serving in the Civil War, the women of the March family--the loving matriarch, Marmee,(Laura Dern) and her four daughters, are left all alone to fend for themselves. At a party with her older sister Meg, Jo befriends Laurie, the handsome grandson of their neighbour, Mr. Lawrence. When Meg, Jo, Laurie, and John - Laurie's tutor and Meg's eventual husband - go to the theatre, a jealous Amy burns Jo's writings, deeply upsetting Jo. Marmee learns that the girls' father is ill from the war and leaves to visit him. When Beth, contracts scarlet fever, Amy, who has not had the disease, is sent to stay with Aunt March in Paris. Before romance, tragedy and the ordinary pains of growing up complicate matters, they are an inseparable if not always harmonious troupe.

Jo reflects back and forth on herself and her sisters, and begins writing a novel based on their lives. She sends the first chapters to an editor, Mr. Dashwood. In New York, Mr. Dashwood's daughters demand to know how Jo's book ends. He agrees to publish the book but finds it unacceptable that the main character is unmarried. She changes the ending and negotiates copyright and royalties with Mr. Dashwood. Jo observes the printing of her book with the title: *Little Women*.

Critics' comments:

"I've been angry every day of my life," Mrs. March says matter-of-factly, and while "*Little Women*" is full of silliness and sorrow, sweetness and warmth, it doesn't minimize or apologize for that anger. Nor does it mock or marginalize the March family's commitment to social justice, civic responsibility and artistic excellence. All of those were, for Alcott, part of the mainstream of American culture. Gerwig knows that they still are.

And so is this kind of entertainment: generous, sincere, full of critical intelligence and honest sentiment, self-aware without the slightest hint of cynicism, grounded in the particulars of life and accessible to everyone. Don't let the diminutive title fool you. "*Little Women*" is major. It seems fitting to finish with Alcott's last sentence: "I can never wish you a greater happiness than this!" (A.O Scott, *New York Times*)

Gerwig updates the text to present a universal conflict: our inability to be single, independent, and happy. This is one of many meaningful subversions she employs to provide fresh context to a 19th century novel. Though it exposes the pragmatism and economic reality of 19th century women, it is not all as grim as it sounds. In fact, it is as soul-stirring and life-affirming as cinema can get. It is also a film which allows its literary precedent colour its world with beautiful brushstrokes — and is all the more greater because of it. (Prahlad Srihari, *Firstpost*)

