

# Selina Hossain's "Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti": Optimism as a Catalyst for Resilience and Growth

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100473>

Received: 24 January 2026; Accepted: 29 January 2026; Published: 13 February 2026

## ABSTRACT

In Selina Hossain's "Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti," optimism is adroitly woven through various symbols throughout the entire tale of a bunch of fishermen, especially through the characters' utmost belief in resilience and aspiration for a promising and brighter future. The protagonist of the novel, Malek, has been portrayed as a symbol of someone esteemed for his firm belief in optimism and resilience. Optimism empowers emotional resistance and influences people to surmount setbacks while walking on thin ice. It not only cultivates determination but also promotes decisions and patience that are extremely crucial for navigation during extremely difficult stages. Malek's optimism is not limited to his personal life. That extends to his dream for collective growth. He aspires for his community to conquer difficulties and improve their fortune, embracing new possibilities. Through the character Malek, Selina Hossain sings the song of the enduring human spirit. His firm belief in optimism underscores the importance of hope and trust in social transformation, even in insurmountable circumstances. The novel suggests that social norms can be restrictive, but there are ample opportunities for positive change and substantial progress, particularly through the efforts and aspirations of younger generations. The hero believes in the strength of the human mind and the belief that brighter and better day can come even when considering extreme adversity. Malek passionately believes that optimism can work as a catalyst for resilience and growth. Malek encompasses a strong fortitude to persevere and strive for a good purpose. He tries to bounce back from all the hardships adroitly. He shows great tenacity while tackling adverse situations.

**Keywords:** Resilience, optimism, endurance, challenge, adversity, and symbols.

## INTRODUCTION

"Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti" (Published in 1986) is a novel in which Selina Hossain portrays the life and culture of the brave, struggling, dream-driven community living along the banks of the Naf River. Their existence is marked by immense courage, a combative way of life, and people who are both dream-wanderers and deeply loving. Like the ever-flowing river, they seem to cross geographical boundaries and weave dreams – dreams that spread rainbow-coloured wings and fly through the interconnectedness of life. These dreams do not allow the scorching, kite-filled noons of wildfire to arrive merely to sing songs of sorrow; instead, they announce the golden, life-affirming history of new dreams. This is a novel that embodies the existential crisis of coastal life in Southeastern Bengal, shaped by proximity to the sea.

The novel artistically portrays the world of Malek and Shafia living on a sea-island – their oyster collecting and pearl harvesting, the rise of the powerful Torab Ali and Goni Mia and their transformation into controlling forces, Malek's sea-conquering struggle, and the self-interest-driven impulses of love and desire. Armed with a vow and all the necessary tools for shark hunting, Malek emerges victorious in the battle of life. Alongside

Malek, characters such as Salek, Bashir Ali, and Suza appear as vivid and dynamic figures. Although many become followers of the villainous Torab and Goni due to financial support and influence, on Shahparee Island, it is the struggle between labour, and the moral integrity of honest people that prevails. This human community shaped by labour and livelihood is classless in nature – its identity is self-evident in its very name.

In the novel “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti”, Malek's strong heroic endurance is presented by his resilience in dealing with social restrictions and challenges. He successfully navigates the confused and extremely complicated relationships well and tries heart and soul to uphold his personal integrity. This exciting tale of a fisherman shows Malek's aptitude to withstand hardships and difficulties. The novel presents an intricate illustration and subtle representation of heroic strength and emotional susceptibility. The novel also highlights a wider topic, particularly human sustainability in the face of social impediments and limitations. Malek's strong personality is marked by his strong willpower, resilience, and his sense of responsibility towards everyone. With a steady commitment to his own values, Malek exerts his utmost effort and enthusiasm while fighting back against the cruel world. His strong ability to stay firm in his beliefs shows his inner strength and moral uprightness.

Carter says that literary works express the mind and personality of the author, which tells essential truths about human life (Carter, 41). Selina Hossain's novels contain the intrinsic value of human life. Selina Hossain is a remarkable Bangladeshi author and is recognized for her contributions to Bengali literature. She wrote in detail on a variety of topics, including history, culture, and women's issues. “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti” is a famous novel by Selina Hossain. It examines the topics of human relationships, social customs, and multiple struggles women face in patriarchal societies in Bangladesh. The story mainly deals with the complexities of family life as well as the emotional landscapes of its major characters. The novel also picturizes the dynamics, love and betrayal of family relationships and shows how these crucial elements shape individual lives and individual decisions. Furthermore, it presents an emotional critique of social structures and provides us with a deep insight into human experiences.

## METHODOLOGY

This current study employed a descriptive qualitative method to explore Selina Hossain's well-known novel “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti”, where the author portrays unyielding resilience against oppression within the broader socio-political landscape. This methodology allows the researcher a detailed analysis of how the author constructs the reality of marginalized individuals who continue to show perseverance and refuse to surrender to the extreme adversities of life. The main source of this study is a 128-page novel by Selina Hossain called “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti”. The text will be explored as the central literary artifact and passages reflecting the resilience and optimism of the protagonist will serve as the major units of detailed analysis. Secondary resources include other literary works such as “The Old Man and the Sea” by Ernest Hemingway, Helen Keller's “Optimism,” and Martin Seligman's “Learned Optimism.” Magazines, journals, research articles, and dictionaries will be used to provide interpretive support.

## DISCUSSION

Selina Hossain, a distinguished Bangladeshi author, is widely known for her novels that deal with social injustice, women's identity and resilience, struggles and hardship of ordinary people, moral decay, political oppression, etc. She was born on June 14, 1947. She studied MA in Bengali Language and Literature at Rajshahi University. She penned twenty-one novels that include “Josnay Shurjo Jala” (1973), “Jolochchas” (1972), “Hangor Nodi Grenade” (1976), “Japito Jibon” (1981), “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti” (1986), etc. Her major short stories include: “Utso Theke Nirontor” (1969), “Punorjonmo” (1986), “Onura Purnima” (2008) etc. “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti” was adapted as a film in 1996. Akhtaruzzaman was the director of the movie. The movie had won Bangladesh National Film Awards in various categories like: Best Film, Best Director, Best Story, and Best Cinematography. The lead actors of the movie were Bobita, Khaled Khan, and Alamgir. Selina Hossain's novels and short stories were translated into different languages such as English, Russian, French, Korean, Japanese, Finnish, and Malay etc. In 1980, she received a prestigious national award, the Bangla Academy Literary Award. In 2009, she received the Ekushey Padak. From 2014 to 2018, she served as the

chairman of the Bangladesh Shishu Academy. She was the chairman of Bangla Academy from February 3, 2022, until she resigned in October 2024. There can be no doubt that Selina Hossain is the most ingenious master of Bengali literature of her time. In “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti”, she purveyed the message of optimism through the character of Malek.

In “Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti” Malek's act of collecting oysters is symbolic and significant. It delves into deeper themes of survival, resilience, and deep human connection with mother nature. This action not only illustrates the physical aspects but also the metaphorical aspects of the struggle for food and hope in the face of tribulations. Oyster collection is a practical action related to survival. It represents the way marginalized communities rely only on natural resources to maintain their livelihood. For Malek, this toil draws attention to the harsh reality of poverty, where every small crack is a procedure to support himself and his family. Malek's endeavour to accumulate oysters reflects his insight and determination, giving him the best of the meagre opportunities he has available around him. It emphasizes the ability to adapt and find a way despite challenging circumstances. The hidden oysters and maintenance efforts represent hope and reward for sustainability. Oysters are expressions of the way nature represents both challenges and sources of food. Oysters are often associated with the idea of pearl-hidden treasures that come from common or rough things. This symbolism agrees with Malek's optimism and belief that even in difficult circumstances, there is something precious and transformative.

The novel illustrates the challenges of the people of Shahparee Island, including poverty, scarcity of resources, and the constant threat of natural hazards like cyclones and rising sea levels. Despite its difficulties, Shahparee is a symbol of resilience. The inhabitants always try to build, survive, and thrive after each disaster, just like the ants mentioned in the title of the novel.

The main character of the novel, Malek, is used as an epitome of personal integrity. Personal integrity refers to the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. It involves adherence to values and beliefs, even when facing challenges and temptations. Individual integrity is defined as strong morality or values and adherence to these principles, both in their words and actions. (<https://getmarlee.com/blog/personal-integrity>). Malek's optimism is deeply rooted in his strong belief in candour, diligence and ethical behaviour, not just blind hope. He inspires others with his activities and shows that even in the face of difficult situations, he can uphold integrity. Keeping up endurance refers to the ability to confront adversity, challenges and extreme difficulties that involve resilience and strength. Even in the face of multiple overwhelming obstacles, they embody qualities such as endurance, courage, and an unwavering commitment to values and goals. In Malek's context, his heroic endurance emphasizes his expertise in controlling personal and social barriers, highlighting the extreme complexities of human resilience. Comparing Malek with his four brothers makes it easy to understand Malek.

Every sibling has different traits and perspectives. They show different degrees of adhesion to traditional roles. Some can prioritize personal ambitions and social expectations and create tension within family dynamics. Their diverse techniques highlight the convolutions of brotherhood and the consequences of external pressure on individual decisions. His older brother Suza is a traditional and authoritative person in the family. He is a fisherman. He works for Torab Ali. He is an honest person, but he fights to maintain his family through his small income. It is a conflict between maintaining his integrity and the harsh reality of financial struggle. He puts his worth at risk to survive financially. He decided to sell the fish to foreign trawlers. He asks his fishing colleague: “Would you sell fish to foreign trawlers?” (Selina, 41) His assistants immediately agree. This choice highlights the struggle for survival in highly competitive economic landscapes, and in many cases, people often force them to put their values and traditional practices at risk. Suza sacrifices his honesty to survive in this harsh world. He succumbs to the temptation of materialism. According to Dictionary.com, materialism is “Preoccupation with or emphasis on material objects, comforts, and considerations, with a disinterest in or rejection of spiritual, intellectual, or cultural values.” (<http://www.dictionry.com>) According to Study.com, “Materialism is the infatuation with physical objects over intellectual or spiritual experiences and relationships.” (<http://study.com>).

Malek's brother Salek represents the intricacy of opportunism and the impact of economic restraint on personal relationships. Salek wants to be rich by hook or crook. He betrays Julekha for money and marries

Goni Mia's daughter. He decides to prioritize opulence and sacrifices loyalty and love. This action underscores the sharp conflict between material prosperity and personal values. When Malek asks Salek to marry Julekha, Salek responds: "What will I get after marriage?" (Selina, 86) Salek also chooses dishonesty over loyalty and integrity. Although his brothers could not resist the provocation of materialism, Malek stands firm. His incredible tenacity, perseverance, and determination to succeed are commendable examples to everyone.

Our main character, Malek, is a symbol of a very optimistic man. Despite confronting a bunch of setbacks, his relentless and steadfast determination made him different in his community. He practised superior human qualities with extreme integrity and commitment. Due to his admirable social work and his truthfulness, the people in his flock began to deposit their hard-earned money in his custody. With this money, they built their own boats and began a new trip to the sea to catch sharks. According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, an optimist is: "a person who always expects good things to happen or thinks to be successful" (P. 1083). The optimist has faith, courage, and hope for his future. He loves to stay positive in all difficult situations.

According to Helen Keller, "The optimists will use every time and circumstances to break away the obstacle that blocks their desires. Their soul will beat a glad march to every new discovery, for them every fresh victory comes over difficulties, and every success adds to human knowledge and happiness (Helen, 2010:5, 9).

Another prominent critic Givray (2011) opines that the optimists know when to let go although they are strong in personality and perseverance, and they strongly believe that perseverance is powerful but when they meet something which can't be changed, they will let it go and are willing to move on". Martin Seligman has something similar to add that the central skill of optimism is the power of "non-negative thinking, it is someone's ability in challenging the destructive things he says to himself when he experiences the setbacks that life deals all of them (Seligman, 2006:15).

The major characteristics of optimistic people, according to Seligman (in Stein & Howard, 2002), include:

- Optimists view setbacks in life as temporary flat lines on a graph. They have an open mind that difficult times do not last forever but are only temporary and have faith that the situation will improve. They view difficulties as delayed success, not as crushing defeat.
- Optimistic people tend to view misfortune as a situational and specific problem, not as a form of disaster that is inevitable and will last forever.
- Optimistic people will not immediately place all the blame on themselves.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, optimism is: "the quality of being full of hope and emphasizing the good parts of a situation, or a belief that something good will happen. "Malek's optimism works as a catalyst for growth and advancement, the unwavering reliance on a brighter future and the source of robustness in the face of extreme adversity. Vocabulary.com defines catalyst like this: "A catalyst is an event or a person causing a change." (<https://www.vocabulary.com>)

Malek proves that self-determination and unwavering will win the battle. He is like Santiago, the hero of the novel, "The Old Man and the Sea", written by Ernest Hemingway. Santiago never surrendered his hope to pessimism. He asserted his manliness throughout his struggle with the giant sharks, all alone, in a wide sea. His confidence was never overshadowed. Similarly, Malek's confidence was always his weapon to fight back in this cruel world. Shafia's betrayal, although it is emotionally devastating, cannot break Malek's indomitable spirit and optimism. Helen Keller opines, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement; nothing can be done without hope." (<https://www.themarginalian.org/2013/06/21/helen-keller-on-optimism/>). Malek embodies his determination to be resilient. His strength lies in his unwavering belief in hard work and integrity. Shafia's decision to marry the gambler emphasizes a sharp contrast between superficial charm and true integrity. It is instantly drawn to satisfaction, but Malek remains immovable in his principles, indicating that his optimism is deeply rooted in a slightly deeper depth than his fleeting relationships. This resistance not only enhances Malek's character as a moral compass in the story but also serves as a criticism of those who succumb to social fantasies such as greed or societal illusions, like Shafia. Shafia lacks a sense of morality. She chooses Shukur over Malek. In this prominent piece of art, Selina Hossain refuses to uphold pessimism fully as a counterpart of optimism. Pessimism appears in fragmented forms through figures like Shafia, Suza, and Salek. Shafi's economic insecurity, social and gendered vulnerability are the reasons behind her

pessimism. Her pessimism functions as a counter-voice to Malek's optimism. The reason behind Shafia's pessimism is the proof that fear, insecurity, and gendered vulnerability can challenge the moral absolutism of optimism. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, pessimism is "an inclination to emphasize adverse aspects, conditions, and possibilities or to expect the worst possible outcome." Oliver Bennett (2001) in "Cultural Pessimism: Narratives of Decline in the Postmodern World" opines that pessimism is a type of mental attitude in which an undesirable outcome is anticipated from a given situation. Pessimists always tend to highlight and focus on the negatives of life in general. A common question asked to test for pessimism is "Is the glass half empty or half full?"; in this situation, a pessimist will see the glass as half empty, or in extreme cases, empty, while an optimist will see the glass as half full. Salek's pessimism in "Pokamakorer Ghorbosoti" reflects male disempowerment and class-oriented disillusionment. It showcases how economic marginalization reinforces the death of optimism, how aspiration becomes resignation, how resistance transforms into surrender. Salek finally succumbs to knavery, succumbs to his desires. Malek's elder brother Suza's pessimism is quieter, more internalized because he fails to trust his abilities. Malek is opposite in nature. His incredible tenacity, perseverance, and determination to succeed are commendable examples to everyone.

Malek's ability to move forward symbolizes the hope and idea that true strength lies in capturing value, regardless of external circumstances. Malek's unwavering optimism is one of the crucial aspects of his character. While Malek's commitment to his values and hope for a better future is exposed to betrayal and emotional turbulence, Malek's commitment is characterized by a better future. His optimism serves as a source of strength, allowing him to overcome personal setbacks and focus on his goals. This optimism is not naive but deeply rooted in its moral clarity and understanding of life's struggles. It also serves as a counterpoint to the moral weaknesses of other characters, such as Shafia, Salek, and Suza, which represent the appeal of abbreviations and materialism.

Optimism fosters a proactive mind and acts as a catalyst for growth and resilience. Optimists view adversities, obstacles and challenges as temporary barriers that are completely surmountable. They are not afraid of taking risks. They consider setbacks as golden opportunities to learn and grow. They motivate others to set ambitious endeavours and promote perseverance and resilience. Malek, in this novel, encourages the young generation of Shahparee Island to come forward and fight back for their rights. He is different from Santiago of "The Old Man and the Sea." Santiago wanted to prove his manliness, tried to assert his heroism, but Malek fights for his folk, for the entire community. He tried to encourage the youth of his locality. He told them that they can achieve success through trial and suffering. Experience of trial and suffering can make them stronger.

Our hero, Malek, was mercilessly beaten by his enemies because they were getting uneasy and jealous of the increasing advancement of the fisherman. He got terrible injuries, but he did not curse them even then. He was not in a very good physical condition. He could even die. Still, he did not give up hope and patience. There were more factors that could drive him towards frustration. But things were just otherwise. He recovered from injuries and took the initiative to establish a co-operative society. He wanted all fishermen to come together under one umbrella and advance towards success. His fellowmen were strongly motivated by their faith in him and reliance on him. They got a new speed and new strength. They all donated money to buy two boats, fishing nets, and fishing hooks. All were excited, young, and old. They started their journey towards the sea. On the fifth day, they were able to catch two giant sharks. They were simply overjoyed and speechless at their success. They were thinking that the people of their locality would be astonished to find out that they had managed to catch giant sharks successfully. Upon receiving this news of success, everyone in their community will praise Malek. The first shark was around sixty kilograms. Malek most desperately tried to do this heroic endeavour alone. As the shark was still alive, Malek had to lose his right hand while confronting the giant shark. The right hand was displaced. While losing his consciousness, Malek could hear other fishing trollers. He had done this, yes! Finally, he caught two giant sharks that no one on Shahparee Island ever dared to do.

## CONCLUSION

By Malek, Selina Hossain presents an inspiring example of how personal integrity can serve as a foundation for resilience and leadership. Malek's tenacity reflects his refusal to surrender to hardship. His fortitude symbolizes the enduring spirit of the oppressed. Malek's unyielding spirit transforms all his sufferings and

hardships of life into a testament to courage and inner strength. The novel offers a powerful message through Malek. Hope and integrity can even win in the face of betrayal and adversity. His ability to maintain optimism inspires not only himself but those around him and becomes a beacon of positivity and determination in a world surrounded by obstacles and challenges.

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