

# Seeing the Unseen

## Healing from Narcissistic Family Dynamics

By Tamreez Inam

Narcissism is a word that has entered everyday conversation, often used to label self-absorbed behaviour or toxic relationships. But for **Dr Rachna Buxani**, psychotherapist and author of *Unseen*, there is far more to it than the popular headlines suggest. "Although narcissism is frequently discussed, its deeper psychological and relational impact is still poorly understood, even within psychotherapy," she explains. "Narcissistic harm is often subtle, cumulative, and emotionally disorienting rather than overtly abusive, which makes it difficult to identify and validate."

This invisibility, Buxani says, leaves many survivors doubting their own perceptions. Psychoeducation, the process of learning the language and patterns of narcissism, is crucial for healing. "Awareness does not undo the past, but it interrupts its unconscious repetition, allowing individuals to respond differently in the present. When people can name patterns such as gaslighting, emotional neglect, or conditional love, they are able to make sense of long-standing confusion." For Buxani, knowledge is hope. By naming and understanding these dynamics, survivors can reclaim their reality and begin relating to themselves with compassion rather than self-blame.

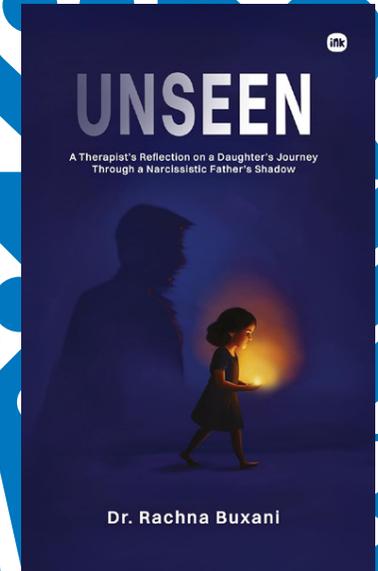
While *Unseen* focuses on one central case study, a father-daughter relationship marked by narcissism, Buxani says the book also illuminates broader patterns. The parent-child relationship is uniquely influential, shaping identity before a child has the emotional capacity to protect themselves. "In father-daughter dynamics, the father often becomes the lens through which worth, safety, and belonging are defined," she says. "When that relationship is emotionally unavailable or controlling, the daughter internalises shame and self-doubt as part of who she is, rather than as a response to an unhealthy dynamic. These relationships are frequently minimised or culturally normalised, despite their lasting psychological impact."

For those recognising narcissistic patterns in their own family, Buxani emphasises that the first step is internal validation. "Before boundaries or decisions about contact, there must be an honest acknowledgement that what was experienced was real and impactful. Many people rush to forgive, rationalise, or minimise, especially when the relationship involves a parent. Healing begins when individuals allow themselves to trust their own perceptions and emotional responses." This moment of recognition is often quiet, but it marks a profound internal shift from survival to self-awareness.

In cultures where duty and care towards parents are deeply held values, the idea that healing requires 'disengagement' or walking away from a parent can feel confronting and can lead to a sense of abandoning a core value. Dr Buxani clarifies, "It may involve redefining boundaries, limiting emotional exposure, or adjusting expectations. Compassion and care can coexist with self-protection. The deeper conflict is not between self and parent, but between self and internalised expectations. Healing often involves redefining loyalty in a way that allows dignity, distance, and emotional truth to coexist."

Hope is central to *Unseen*. For audiences attending Buxani's session at the Emirates Airline Festival of Literature 2026, she hopes they will leave feeling "seen, less alone, and reassured that healing is possible, that self-trust can be rebuilt, and one's story can be consciously reclaimed, regardless of the past." Drawing on both clinical expertise and lived experience, her work offers clarity, validation, and a path toward resilience.

For Buxani, the unseen wounds of narcissistic relationships are not inevitable barriers to a fulfilling life. By learning to recognise and name them, survivors can finally reclaim their voice – and their story.



## Unseen: The Invisible Legacy of Narcissism

SATURDAY, 24 JAN 2026

Time	Language	Price
6:00 - 7:00 PM	English	AED 50

Narcissistic harm is rarely obvious – it's subtle, cumulative and often leaves people doubting their own reality. In this powerful session, psychotherapist and author **Dr Rachna Buxani** draws on her book *Unseen* to reveal how narcissistic family dynamics quietly shape identity, self-worth and emotional safety. Unpacking patterns like gaslighting, emotional neglect and conditional love, she explores why parent-child relationships, especially those shaped by cultural expectations of duty and loyalty, are so hard to name and heal. Compassionate and validating, this session offers clarity and a path to reclaiming your story.