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Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan. *The Scandal of the State: Women, Law, and Citizenship in Postcolonial India.* Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. xv + 313 pp. $84.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8223-3035-6; $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3048-6.

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Right/s in Your Eye

In the title of Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan's book, the words "state" and "women" appear contiguously but with a critical separation of a colon. It is a relationship that runs through the chapters of the book, each an essay based on a specific case (the child bride, the surrendered *dacoit*, the unborn female fetus, and so on) drawing on the complexities of association and disconnection that configure the relation of the state with its women citizens. Straight off in the preface, Sunder Rajan makes clear that she does not think of the state as an abstraction. It is an inescapable presence in our everyday lives (p.xi). Citizenship matters in wholly concrete ways perhaps most intelligible from the position of those who do not have it, but also from the perspective of those who cannot exercise it. What does it mean to have citizenship and be part of a nation-state if you are a woman? Sunder Rajan briefly outlines various theories of the state in her introduction including Carole Pateman's work on the nature of the social contract as a sexual-social pact that is patriarchal (or fraternal in the case of the liberal state) and half blind to its hidden citizens who do not appear in the public domain to demonstrate their participation in the affairs of the state though an exertion of rights. What then does it mean to be a rights-bearing citizen of a state when no one can "see" the practice of citizenship?

That, it seems to me, is the point of departure in Sunder Rajan's work. All her essays focus on cases of women who have been brought to the public eye, circulated in public discourse and through this public performance of presence forced the state to acknowledge their existence and perform its duties, fulfill its obligations on their behalf–and be seen to be doing so. So the state's performance of its obligations towards its citizens and its effort to ensure citizenship rights must equally be a public performance of presence. The state emerges in the encounter as much as citizenship "whose value and weight are produced through exercising it" (p. 19). Of course the state is not a homogenous monolith and does not reside solely in a set of identifiable rules and institutions; but neither does it appear and disappear like an eccentric phantom. The postmodern turn and turn again in political studies of the state make this amply clear. The state is a social process with the juridical legislative power to effect change. As social process the state is as much part of making things happen–?directed development like a green revolution, for example–as it is of defining and constituting what those things are: rights of immigrants, of children and, as argued in this book, of different categories of women who fell out of place and literally grabbed the headlines.

Among the strong, emotive cases that Rajan journeys us through, the hysterectomies performed on inmates of a home for the mentally retarded (chapter 3) brings sharply into focus the fact that, in the eyes of the state, citizenship is not a "given" identity of birth, but split between different kinds of citizens. In a practice that was declared "standard procedure" (p. 73) by the director of the Department of Women, Child and Handicapped Development, on the plea that these less responsible women could not manage their menstruation, hysterectomies were performed on eighteen women between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five who were inmates of a state-run facility. The doctor who did the operations executed them as part of his "social service" toward the community; to demonstrate his role as a responsible citizen he performed the social-sexual service for free. The point about the nature of custodial care provided by the state most stunningly brings to the surface the state's individualizing project to produce citizens in specific ways. Phillip Corrigan and Derek Sayers see this generative potential in terms of the state constituting individuals as taxpayers, voters, and so on.[1] Sunder Rajan's essay highlights the way that citizens are also pro-

duced as "less" or "more" of a citizen. Through its actions the state produces two kinds of citizens: those who are entitled to resist the state and its actions, and in and through their resistance display their rights as citizens to have a voice and free choice; and those who are constituted as partial citizens who have no say on how the state takes care of them. Menstruation and the bodies of women appear as matter out of place, no longer handled privately but part of a public discourse of regulation. The state's ability to constitute gendered citizens is most visibly apparent in the excise of the biological body, a constitutive power noted by Franzway, Court, and Connell in "Staking a Claim," cited by Sunder Rajan.

The nuances and negotiations of who is a citizen, with claims and rights, are elaborated in a specific way vis-à-vis female infanticide and sex-selected feticide in the last section titled "Killing Women." Ranjan, quite rightly, does not believe in glossing over what she thinks demography is telling us. She does not mess around with the coy phrase "social causes" that appears in census mortality statistics, which is Primary Health Center-speak for infanticide (p. 179). Not unnaturally, "social" causes show a marked difference between male and female deaths. In the southern state of Tamil Nadu it is also the highest cause of female mortality compared to others–diarrhea, fever, respiratory failure. Sunder Rajan's statistics take us up to the decade of the 1990s, although she briefly cites more recent data (p. 202). A more recent survey conducted by the Department of Population at Bharathiar University showed that induced abortions were higher in Tamil Nadu in comparison to the national average (7.3 percent as compared to 1.8 percent).[2] While induced abortions are not in themselves evidence of sex-selective abortions, they do emphasize that the decision to abort is rarely taken by the woman alone. In fact, in almost half the cases recorded by this survey the husband made the decision either alone or with his parents or his wife's parents. The question of whose decision and right is invoked is extremely fraught, because it does involve the woman but places her participation and consent within a frame of "illegality."

Given the fact that infanticide is illegal but also so widespread, the quandary of the state is how to name it: is it a crime or a social evil? Sunder Rajan's dwells at some length on the implications of both labels particularly on the question of representation. It is not possible to go into the nuances of her argument here, but an aspect that I think is significant is the way the state creates policies to effect change in the sex ratio. Both the Cradle Baby Scheme and the Girl Child Protection Scheme were introduced in Tamil Nadu to encourage parents to keep their girl babies alive. The underpinning of the logic of economic incentives built into state schemes puts families and state at odds (as killers and saviors) but also brings them in sync. The underlying logic suggests the idea of a rational plan subscribed to by state and families which harness economic resources in the best possible way. While Sunder Rajan herself does not say this, it does seem that the arguments of Giddens and Beck-Gernsheim that "life as a planning project" marks modernity, with new, risky options and choices appearing on personal landscapes, is significant.[3] "Planning for the family" does inform choices and strategies in postcolonial India. Dissatisfied with dowry as the only explanation to account for femicide, Sunder Rajan points to the enormously different choices (and how to fund them) that high risk modernities present to families. It is in this sense that the child, as a property of the family (a logic that extends to the unborn fetus), is critical. A village woman declares, "the village *panchayat* and the village administrative officer have no right to investigate or interfere with our personal affairs. If I and my husband have the right to have a child, we also have the right to kill it if it happens to be a daughter and we decide to kill it. Outsiders have no right to poke their noses in this" (p. 190).

Are the mourning songs that dwell on "fate" and the seeming inevitability of killing daughters (p. 209) underpinned by a discourse of purposive intention in which planning for the family is valued? Given the village woman's statement, we need to seriously address the fact of the family plan in the decisions taken about a daughter's death. I understand the point that Sunder Rajan makes about the way that grieving needs to find a semiotic language of representation or else it remains unacknowledged; but it also seems that grieving has a way of being said when the death and the grieving are "for" the family. As Sunder Rajan takes us case-by-case through her book, she leaves the cross-cutting exercises and excursions down different pathways to us. The fact that so many of her essays dwell not just on women, but on children–Ammena, the child bride; the underage pubertal girls in the state "home"; the dead daughters who leave a trace of themselves on sex ratios; Phoolan Devi, the *dacoit* who "obtrude(s)–first as a theoretical puzzle and then, increasingly, as a 'supplement"' (p.212), "married off as a child to a much older man" and whom the superintendent of police negotiating her surrender called "infant, or untamed animal" (p. 228)–force us to think about larger questions of agency and choice that lie in the idea of citizenship. Not many of the persons who inhabit the book would be recognized as full citizens of any

state. They lie in the custodial care of others whose hands are rough. However, the fact that these are not androgynous children but constituted as gendered persons gives weight to arguments of the state as constituting gender, and Sunder Rajan's view that "a great deal of what it does is also gendered" (p. 226).

Notes

[1]. Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayers, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985).

[2]. *The Hindu*, June 28, 2004, p. 6.

[3]. Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Re-inventing the Family: In Search of New Lifestyles* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); and Anthony Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," in *Reflexive Modernization* eds. Ulrich Beck. Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), pp. 56-109.

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