



IT seems that as society gets increasingly dark and amoral following the collapse of family values, there is virtually no limit to the evil that certain people will do. Things that society in times past did not envisage even with all its limitations and excesses are happening with bewildering rapidity. In Jigawa State recently, the police arrested a 20-year-old groom, Auwal Abdulwahab, and his three friends for allegedly gang-raping his bride to death! According to the spokesman of the command, SP Lawan Shiisu Adam, the incident happened on April 26 at about 11p.m. in Tungo village in Albasu District of Sule Tankarkar Local Government Area of the state. Hear him: "The groom is alleged to have conspired with his three friends, namely Nura Basiru, Muttaka Lawan and Hamisu Musa, and entered into their matrimonial home with the intention of coercing his bride into non-consensual sexual activity. While in the process, the said wife died." Adam said preliminary investigation revealed that the bride had reportedly disagreed with her husband on marital relations until their wedding.

Upon receiving the report, he said, a team of policemen rushed to the scene and the body was evacuated to the Gumel General Hospital, where a doctor on duty confirmed the victim's death. He added that the corpse was released to her parents for burial, while the four suspects were apprehended and taken into custody. On his part, the Commissioner of Police, Jigawa State, CP A.T Abdullahi, directed that the case be immediately transferred to the State CID Dutse for a discreet investigation. Adam added: "After the investigation is completed, all suspects will be prosecuted accordingly. The suspects will face two charges under relevant laws of the jurisdiction, including criminal conspiracy and culpable homicide."

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This story is, to say the least, distressing. The act that the main suspect in this case committed together with his friends is so depraved as to beggar belief. This is, for want of a better term, animalistic behaviour, and that is even by way of speaking, because animals do not engage in such repulsive, violent and shockingly criminal acts. Certainly, no right-thinking human would ever get involved in such a base act. In view of the dark turn that society has taken, particularly in recent times, we have had cause to counsel time and again that people exercise extreme caution in entering into relationships, particularly romantic ones. In the present case, the tendency to commit the kind of atrocity that the suspect is charged with must have been there all along, but it was perhaps ignored or underestimated. In allegedly asking for sexual relations before marriage, the main suspect was not just acting like many members of the society are known to do: he was actually opening a window into his obsession with dark sexual fetishes, but his bride went along with the marriage plans either because she was pressured into doing so or because she genuinely did not know the man she was going to be married to.

Although as the Bard of Avon, William Shakespeare, famously said, there is no art to discern the mind's construction in the face, there is nothing that can be lost in being a bit more careful and introspective. There are, it seems, too many killers out there on the streets seeking whom to devour, even in the name of marriage, and there is no reason to rush or pressure people into marriage. The groom in this story is said to be 20 years old and so it is reasonable to assume that the bride was about the same age or younger, which would mean that she got married at that age probably due to cultural dictates. We do not want to approach the question of culture with any kind of ill-feeling but we hasten to add that the practice of rushing girls and young women into marriage, even when they have not acquired sufficient education or trade and skills that they can survive on, is utterly repugnant. Marriage is such a serious issue and making efforts to get to know who the bride or groom really is before sealing the marital bond is not such a bad idea. Courtship is essential, even if all it does is to enable the intending couple to engage in serious discussions and to seek to iron out differences. Courtship may not provide all the answers, but at least it offers an opportunity to seek clarifications on issues.

We do not hesitate in asking parents to scrutinise the persons their children bring home for the purpose of marriage, particularly these days when there are deviants everywhere. It would be strange, if not actually foolish, for a parent not to know what his/her child's prospective partner does for a living, and the family that (s)he comes from. Such background checks on which the society placed much premium in times past are not about pretending to have supernatural knowledge; they are about being a little careful. Drug abuse and perversions of all kinds have gripped society today, and it is essential that intending couples know whether or not either of them is afflicted by such maladies, and is willing to seek or benefit from professional help.

It is heartbreaking that the victim in this case suffered untold agony at a time she should be starting to enjoy the benefits of marriage. If a woman cannot have protection in her own marital home, where else should she look for it? The victim must have felt safe in her matrimonial home, not realising the sad fate that awaited her. Unless the charges against the suspects are false, the victim was severely abused and treated worse than an animal even in the comfort of the very home she was just starting to build. This is horrendous. Just what is this society turning into? Naturally, husbands see their wives as a treasure, a territory that must not witness any trespass. It is therefore unthinkable that a man would not only violate his wife but enlist the help of friends and co-conspirators in doing so. This charge, if established, should attract the severest punishment.

How will the parents of the victim be feeling now? They must be deeply anguished, having given their daughter's hand in marriage to her would-be killer, as it were. How would the suspect and his co-conspirators feel if anyone treated their sisters in the demonic way they treated the victim? The incident shows an utter lack of conscience among the conspirators, and the law must take its course in this case, and very severely too. May the family of the deceased find the fortitude to survive this hour of anguish, and may the soul of the deceased rest in sweet repose.