

The Holy Prophet (S.A.W.) Was a Man Taught Only in the Divine School

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Is The Belief In An "Unschoolled" Prophet Rooted In The Interpretation Of The Word "Ummi"?

The claim of Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif (who observes that the source of belief in an "unschooled" Prophet (SA) has been in the interpretation of the word "ummi"), is unfounded. This is because, firstly, the history of the Arabs and the Makkah at the advent of Islam, is decisive evidence of the fact that the Prophet (SA) was untaught.

Earlier, we have explained that the status of reading and writing in Hijaz at the advent of Islam, was such that the names of all the people familiar with reading and writing were recorded in the history, but no one had listed the Prophet (SA) among such people. Assuming that there was no reference to the question, nor any explanation thereof, Muslims following the unquestionable verdict of history, would have to accept that their Prophet (SA) was untaught. Secondly, in the Holy Qur'an, there is another verse which is not less explicit than the verses of Surat "al Ar'af containing the word "ummi". On the concept of "ummi" used in the verses of "Surat Al-A'raf", the opinion is divided among the Islamic interpreters of the Qur'an; but on the concept of the following verse which indicates unschooled or untaught Prophet (SA), there is no difference of opinion:

"And you did not read before it any book, nor did you write one with your right hand, for then those, who say untrue things, could have doubted (29:48). "

This verse makes it explicit that the Prophet (SA) neither read nor wrote before his prophethood. Islamic exegetes have generally given a similar interpretation of the verse. But Dr `Abd al-Latif claims that, the very verse has been misinterpreted.

He claims that the word "kitab" used in this verse, has a reference to such sacred books as the Tawrat (Old Testament) and the Injil (Bible). He claims that the verse suggests that until the revelation of the Holy Qur'an, the Prophet (SA) was unfamiliar with any sacred book, for such books were not available in Arabic, and if the Prophet (SA) had read the books available then in a language other than Arabic, he would have been suspected and accused by the idle talkers. This claim is not true. Contrary to its meaning nowadays widely used in Persian, the word "kitab" in Arabic language has been defined purely as "writing", be it a letter or a book, sacred or otherwise, or be it holy or otherwise. This word has been used in the Holy Qur'an repeatedly. Occasionally, this word "kitab" has been used (in the Holy Qur'an) to signify a letter sent by one

person to another, such as the one concerning the "Queen of Saba": "O Noble Men! I have received a revered letter from Sulayman (Solomon) "; and occasionally it is used in connection with an agreement concluded as a document between the two parties: "Slaves who wish to be freed as per an agreement, accede to their requests to conclude such contracts". At times the term has been used in connection with occult tablets and heavenly truths which tell scientific facts about the world events:

"There is neither any thing green nor dry but (it is all) in a clear book ...(6:59). "

In the Holy Qur'an, only at places where the word "ahl" has been added to form "ahl al-kitab", a particular concept is meant.

"Ahl al-Kitab" signifies "the followers of a heavenly book." In the Surat al-Nisa' of the Holy Qur'an, verse 152 reads: "The followers of the heavenly book shall ask you to send unto them a letter from the heavens. " In this verse, the term has been employed at two places: at one place, in conjunction with the term "ahl" and at another place, it is used alone. Wherever the term "ahl" has been prefixed, it is meant "heavenly book" and wherever it is used alone it is meant "letter". In addition, the construction of the sentence: "You did not write with your right hand" suggests: "You did neither read nor write and if you knew how to read and write, you would have been accused of copying from some other source; but since you did not know how to read or write, there was no room for such an accusation".

However, if the purport is that "You did not read the holy books since they were available in other languages", then, the verse would be under-stood as:. "earlier you neither read nor wrote in other languages", which is not right, for only reading the books in those languages would have well justified the accusation, and also it would not have been necessary for him to have been able to write in those languages. If he had been able to write in those languages it would have justified the accusation, even though he should have written in his own language. Admittedly, here, there is a point which may confirm Dr `Abd al-Latif's view, even though neither he himself nor any one of the exegetists has given attention to this point.

In this holy verse, the word "tatlu" has been used, a word derived from the root "tilawah" which, as referred to in Raghib's book: "Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an", is peculiar to reading the holy verses, and which contrasts with the generic term "Qira'ah" signifying "reading". Therefore, although the word "kitab" is applied commonly to "the holy and other books", the term "tatlu" is peculiar to reading "the Holy" verses.

Evidently, however, the reason that the word "tatlu" has been used here, is that the subject under discussion is the Qur'an. The term has been used in respect of all the texts for reading, ie, as if it should have been said to mean: "Now you read (tilawah) the Qur'an but you did not

read any writing before the revelation of the Qur'an.

Another verse indicating the unschooling of the Prophet (SA), is verse 52 of the "Surat al-Shura' " (The Counsel):

"And thus We revealed to you a spirit by Our command. You did not know what a writing or a faith was ...(42:52)."

The verse suggests: "You were unfamiliar with the book or a writing until the Qur'an was revealed. "Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif has made no mention of this verse. He may observe that the term "kitab" as used in this verse, means "the holy texts", which existed in a language other than Arabic. The answer to this point, however, is the same as was referred to in the earlier verse.

For some reason, not clear to us, Islamic exegetes have maintained that "kitab" particularly refers to the Qur'an. Therefore, the interpretation of this verse is out of the scope of our logic. Thirdly, the Islamic exegetes been unanimous regarding the meaning of the term "ummi". On the contrary, all the Islamic exegetes and scholars without any exception, have been unanimous on the unschooling of the Prophet (SA) and his non-acquaintance with reading and writing prior to his prophethood. This in itself is a conclusive evidence of the fact that the source of the Muslims' belief in the unschooling of the Prophet (SA) has not been the interpretation of the term "ummi". However, we have to discuss about the meaning of the word .""ummi

The Meaning of the word "Ummi"

." Islamic exegetists have come up with three interpretations of the word "ummi

i) Unschooled and unacquainted with writing)

The majority of exegetes who favour this observation, have said that the word ummi is related to "umm" meaning "mother". The word "ummi" means a person who by birth is familiar with human written works and knowledge; or, it is related to "ummah" ie, who observes the customs of the majority, for the majority of people did not know about writing. Rather, only a few did. Likewise, the word " ummi" means, a man who is like the common people and ignorant.[1] Some have said that the meaning of "ummah" is "creation", and "ummi" is one who has remained in his original state, ie, the illiteracy. For evidence one should refer to a poem[2] by Al-A'sha. However, be it either a derivation of "umm" or "ummah" - or whatever meaning of .""ummah" is preferred - the meaning of the term ummi is the same, ie, "untaught

ii) An inhabitant of Umm al-Qura)

Those who favour this view associate the word with "Umm al-Qura", ie, Makkah. The Qur'anic verse 92 of Surat Al-An'am refers to Makkah as "Umm al-Qura":

...And that you may warn the (inhabitants of) Makkah and those (who live) around it (6:92). " This possibility^[3] has, since ancient times, found its way in the interpretive literature, and is confirmed in a number of Shi'ah ahadith, although these very ahadith have been found to be un-authentic and have been said to be of Israelite origin.^[4] This possibility has, however, been rejected on the basis of certain proofs.^[5]

One reason is that the word "Umm al-Qura" is not a proper noun, and has been applied to Makkah as a common attribute and not as a proper noun of Makkah. The word "Umm al-Qura" signifies the "centre of villages". Any point which serves as a centre of villages is known as "Umm al-Qura". From another Qur'anic verse, ie, verse 59 of the Surat Al-Qasas, it becomes clear that the word carries a descriptive rather than a nominative function:

"Your Lord is not like this that He kills the residents of the villages until He sends a prophet to them in the centre of the villages, reciting to them Our revelations."

It becomes evident that in the Qur'anic language, any point constituting the centre of an area^[6] is called its "Umm al-Qura".

Moreover, this word "Ummi" used by the Holy Qur'an, has been applied to non-Makkans. Verse 19 of Surat Ali 'Imran says:

"...And say to those who have been given the Book and the unlearned people (non-Jewish and non-Christian Arabs): 'Do you submit yourselves?' ... (3:20). "

It then becomes evident that according to the custom of the time; and also in the language of the Holy Qur'an, all the Arabs who did not follow a heavenly book were referred to as "ummiyyin".

More important still is the fact that this word "ummi" was applied for the common Jews who were not educated. Verse 78 of Surat Al-Baqarah of the Holy Qur'an reads: '

"Some children of Israil are "ummi"; who do not know their Book except false hopes... (2:78)". It is obvious that the Jews whom the Holy Qur'an refers to as "ummi" were not the inhabitants of Makkah, but rather, most of them were residents of Madinah or of its neighbourhood. Thirdly, if a word is associated with "Umm al-Qura", literary rules require that "qurawi" should be said in place of "ummi", for, according to the lexical rules governing attribution, when modifying the modifier or the modified, particularly when the modifier is "ab=father", "umm=mother", "ibn=son", or "bint=daughter", it modifies the modified and not the modifier, just as when modifying "Abu Talib", "Abu Hanifah", "Banu Tamim", they are referred to as "Talibi", "Hanafi" and "Tamimi".

iii) Arab polytheists who were not the followers of the Book)

This view has existed among the exegetes of the ancient times. In Majma' al-Bayan, under verse 20 of Surat "Ali-`Imran" of the Holy Qur'an, "ummiyyin" has been placed against "Ahl al-Kitab" This view is described as that of the Companion and great exegete, `Abdullah ibn

`Abbas. Under verse 78 of the Surat Al-Baqarah, Abu `Ubaydah states', a similar view. It follows from what is understood from verse 75 of Surat Ali-`Imran that Al-Tabarsi himself has selected the meaning for the verse. In his book: "Al-Kashshaf", Al-Zamakhshari has provided a similar interpretation of this verse and of verse 75 of the Surat Ali-Imran. Fakhr al-Razi mentions the same possibility under the verse 78 of the Surat al-Baqarah and verse 20 of the Surat Ali-`Imran.

But the fact is that this meaning is not different from the first one. However, it is not correct that a people who do not follow a divine book, be referred to as "ummi" although they may be literate. This term has been applied to Arab polytheists because they were illiterate. What constituted the basis for applying this term to Arab polytheists was their unfamiliarity with reading and writing rather than their not following a heavenly book.

Hence, wherever this word has been used in the plural form and applied to Arab polytheists, this possibility has been mentioned: but wherever it has been used in the singular form and applied to the Holy Prophet (SA), no interpreter has said that the significance is that the Prophet (SA) did not follow one of the heavenly book. In this case, the possibilities are only two at the most.

One is that the Prophet (SA) was not familiar with handwriting, and the other was that he was from Makkah. Since, for the conclusive reasons enumerated above, the second possibility is ruled out, definitely the Prophet (SA) was called "ummi" because he had not been taught, nor did he know how to write.

Here, there is a fourth possibility in regard to the meaning of the word: this being that the word meant unfamiliarity with the texts of holy books.

This possibility, is the one that Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif has innovated, and that he confused it with the third one that we have mentioned, quoting the ancient exegetes. The aforementioned person says:

"The words "ummi" and "ummiyyin" have been used at several places (in the Holy Qur'an) but they have always been used to mean the same everywhere. Lexicographically the term "ummi" means a "newly-born baby" from a mother's womb. It is with reference to this state of living and life, that the word "ummi" came to imply: "one who can neither read nor write. The word "ummi" also means "a person who lived in "Umm al-Qura". "Umm al-Qura" means "the mother

of cities", "capital city", and "metropolis". This was the attribute the Arabs of the Prophet's (SA) time associated with Makkah. Therefore, whoever was from Makkah was referred to as "ummi".

Another area of application of the word "ummi" is to a person who has not been conversant with Semitic texts nor been a follower of Judaism or Christianity which has been referred to as "Ahl al-Kitab" in the Holy Qur'an. In the Holy Qur'an, the word "ummiyyin" was applied to the pre-Islamic Arabs who neither had a holy book nor followed the New Testament and the Old Testament, and that the word was used for Ahl al-Kitab.

While there are so many meanings for the word "ummi" it is not known why the exegetes and translators of the Holy Qur'an, Muslim or non-Muslim, have picked up the meaning namely, "a newly-born baby unaware to his environment" and interpreted it as illiterate and ignorant, and as a consequence, have introduced^[7] the pre-Islam inhabitants of Makkah as "ummiyyin", or "an illiterate people".

Firstly, since the earliest days, the Islamic exegetes have interpreted the words "ummi" and "ummiyyin" in three ways, and have come up with at least three possibilities. Contrary to Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif, Islamic exegetes have not given one single meaning.

Secondly, no one has said that the word "ummi" means a newly-born baby unaware of his surroundings "whose connotation is that a person who can neither read nor write. Basically, this is not applied to a newly-born baby, but rather to an adult who knows as much about the skills of reading and writing as when he is just newly-born. As referred to by logicians, the word signifies "absence and second nature". Islamic logicians would always mention this word as one of the examples of "absence and second nature" in books of logic.

Thirdly, it is not true to say: "the word is also used to mean a person who has no familiarity with ancient Semitic texts". What can actually be inferred from the sayings of early exegetes and lexicologists is that the plural form of the word (ummiyyin) has been used for the Arab polytheists who were generally illiterate, as compared with the "people of the book". The polytheists were perhaps given this humiliating title by the Jews and the Christians.

On the whole, it is illogical to call a people "ummi" who can read and write in their own language, just on the basis of unfamiliarity with a certain book or language. The root of the word is "umm" or "ummah" and implies remaining in the same state as when one is born. But why this word "ummi" has not been recognised as being rooted in "Umm al-Qura", although the possibility has been mentioned consistently, is because of numerous objections which have been mentioned earlier. The Indian scholar's amazement is therefore baseless. It is confirmed by the fact that in some other usages of this word, recorded in books of history and ahadith,

there is no other meaning for it except "untaught". In the book: "Bihar al-Anwar", vol 16, p 119, it is narrated from the Holy Prophet (SA): "We are a people who neither read nor write". In vol 4 of his history book, under the biography of Muhammad ibn `Abd al-Malik, popularly known as

Ibn Al-Zayyat, a minister of Al-Mu'tasim and Al-Mutawakkil, Ibn Khallikan writes: "Earlier he was among the secretaries of Al-Mu'tasim, the `Abbassid Caliph, and Ahmad ibn Shadi Al-Basri was the minister. Once a letter came to Al-Mu'tasim, which the minister read for the Caliph. The word "kala' " was in the letter and Al-Mu'tasim, who was not a knowledgeable person, asked his minister for its meaning. The minister didn't know the meaning either. The Caliph said: "An untaught Caliph and an ignorant minister". Then he asked for one of the secretaries to come. Ibn Al-Zayyat was present and came for explaining the meaning of the word. He explained through some other words which were closer to the meaning and stated their differences. This formed a prelude for him to become the Caliph's minister later on."

Here, the Caliph, who spoke the language of the ordinary people, meant "untaught" when he used the word "ummi". The poet Nizami says as given below:

Wisdom is inferior to the Messenger Ahmad,
The two worlds depend on the existence of Muhammad.
He is unschooled but stating in the most fluent way,
The inclusive knowledge from Adam to Jesus, I say.
In the keeping of a promise he is perfectly steadfast,
.Ahead of all prophets he was though among them he was the last

Is It Inferred From The Qur'an That The Prophet Used To Read And Write?

According to Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif, it can explicitly be understood from some of the Qur'anic verses that the Prophet (SA) could both read and write: In Surat Ali-`Imran, verse 164, we read: "Truly Allah conferred a benefit upon the believers when He raised among them a Messenger from among themselves, reciting to them His communications and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom, although before that they were in manifest error (3:164). "

Dr. `Abd al-Latif says:

"As the Holy Qur'an clearly states, the foremost duty of the Prophet (SA) was teaching the Qur'an to his followers, and it is certain that the minimum capability required for the one who wants to teach the contents of a book to others is, again as the Qur'an states explicitly, being able to make use of the pen or, at least, being able to read what has been written by the pen." This reasoning seems queer, as, firstly, what all Muslims unanimously believe in, and he

desires to prove the vice versa, is that the Holy Prophet (SA) neither could write nor read before the appointment to prophethood. Such a reasoning at the most can prove that the Holy Prophet (SA) was able to read and write during the period of his prophethood. This is agreed by Sayyid Murtada, Sha'bi and some other people.

Secondly, even as regards the period of prophethood, Dr `Abd al-Latif's reasoning is ineffective; for example, pen, paper, blackboard, drawing, etc, are required when a teacher is to teach reading and writing or to teach mathematics for which he has to solve himself so that the students may learn. However, there is no need for such tools for prophets who teach metaphysics, ethics and halal and haram matters.

Among Mashsha'in philosophers (peripatetic philosophers) were called so because they used to walk when teaching, and the learners had to take notes in order not to forget the matters taught. The Holy Prophet (SA) too frequently advised his followers to write down his sayings. He used to say: "Record the knowledge", and when he was asked, "how?", he answered, "By writing down".[8] He also said:

"May Allah grant happiness to the servant who hears what I say, records it (in his mind) and conveys it to the one who has not heard me saying that."[9]

It is in the traditions that the Messenger of Allah twice announced this statement, "O God bless my successors". "Who are your successors?", he was asked, and he replied, "They are those who come after me, who learn my sayings and traditions and teach them to others"[10]

He also said: "Among the rights of a child on his father is to choose him a good name, teach him writing and choose him a spouse when matured."[11]

The Holy Qur'an states explicitly:

"O believers! whenever you contract a debt with one another for a fixed time, then write it down; and let a scribe write it down between you with equity ...(2:282)."

Thus, based on the commands of Allah (SWT) and His Prophet (SA), Muslims were bound to acquire the noble art of reading and writing in order to preserve their religious heritage; to fulfil their duties towards the rights of their children; and to administer well their worldly affairs. This led to the rise of "the pen movement", which stimulated the people among whom the literate were only a few, to seek knowledge and to acquire the skills of reading and writing with such an enthusiasm that some of them learned few languages in Madinah and could propagate the message of Islam throughout the world in different languages.

History tells us that the Holy Prophet (SA) made the captives of the Battle of Badr free on compensation. Some of them were poor, and were freed without paying while some others had the ability to teach writing and each of them were obliged to teach writing to ten children of

Madinah, in return for their freedom.^[12] This was the extent to which the Holy Prophet (SA) insisted on the learning of reading and writing and on the acquiring of knowledge. But this does not necessarily mean that he had to know and employ these two skills in order to call people to Islam and propagate his religion.

Dr `Abd al-Latif says:

"In the first surah of the Holy Qur'an, Allah makes mention of 'pen' and 'writing'. Isn't this the explicit mentioning of a proof that the Prophet of Islam knew reading and writing and that he made use of them? How was it possible that the Holy Prophet encouraged people seek knowledge and become literate, whilst he himself paid no attention to reading and writing?

Although he always had a pioneering role in any activity."

This is, again, a strange reasoning. The initial verses of the above-mentioned surah indicate, of course, that these were revealed to a servant of Allah (SWT), who was in charge of guiding Allah's other servants, and that the Prophet (SA), who received them at his holy heart, acknowledged the value of reading and writing for men. But these verses never suggest that either Allah (SWT) or the Prophet (SA) dealt with reading, writing, pen or paper.

Dr `Abd al-Latif also says: "The Holy Prophet was the initiator in practising all that he himself ordered. How could he then order this without doing it himself?"

It is, as if to say that a physician who prescribes a medicine for a patient, should first use the medicine himself. Of course, if the physician falls sick and is in need of the same type of medicine, he will definitely take it just as his patient does.

But how about the reverse - when the physician isn't sick and consequently not in need of such a medicine? Here we should see whether the Holy Prophet, like others who were in need of learning the arts of reading and writing in order to attain perfection and to remove their defects, had to acquire these two arts and yet, didn't act upon what he himself ordered, or was he in a state that rendered him independent of them.

The Holy Prophet was the forerunner in matters of worship, devotion, piety, honesty, truth, good-temperedness, democracy, humility and other good manners. For all of these were counted towards his perfection and the lack of these was a defect. But the issue of so-called 'literacy' doesn't belong to this category.

The unusual value of being literate for human beings is because the literacy helps them benefit from one another's knowledge. Writing is essentially the conventional symbols used by people to express themselves. In fact through the familiarity with writing, knowledge can be transmitted from one person to another, from one tribe to another and from one generation to another.

Thus, man preserves his knowledge from extinction. This is why being literate is considered equal to knowing languages, i.e, the more number of languages the man knows, the more means he has at his disposal to acquire knowledge from others.

Both knowing languages and being literate are keys to the acquisition of knowledge rather than the "knowledge" in its real sense. The knowledge implies that the man comes to know of a fact or a law which enjoys reality in the world of existence.

Natural sciences, logic, and mathematics are considered as knowledge because they serve the man to discover a real, creative and cause effect type of relationship among subjective things. But knowing words, grammar and the like are not in themselves knowledge, for these will not make us aware of true relationship between the objects. Instead, they will help us to know a series of conventional matters which do not go beyond the limit of assumption. Knowing these matters means knowing the keys to knowledge rather than "knowledge" itself.

Of course, a series of real phenomena such as the development of words and compositions, which represent the evolution of thought and take place on the basis of natural laws, appear in the context of such conventional matters; and needless to say that it is a part of philosophy and knowledge to know these natural laws. Consequently, the value of literacy lies in the fact that the man can find the key to others' knowledge.

Now, let's see whether acquiring knowledge is limited to man's getting the key to the knowledge of others and making use of it. Does the Prophet have to make use of the knowledge of mankind? If so, then what happens to genius and initiative and to the direct acquisition of knowledge from nature? It actually happens that the most inferior way of seeking knowledge is through the sayings and writing of others, for not only the seeker's personality does not play its role in this process, but also in man's writings there can be found illusions and realities interwoven.

The famous French philosopher, Descartes, after having published a series of articles, earned a worldwide fame and his sayings gave rise to the amazement and admiration of one and all. One of those who had read Descartes' articles and was astounded by them, and whose viewpoint was the same as of Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif, thought that Descartes had found a valuable treasure of books and manuscripts and had received all his knowledge and information from these sources. He met Descartes and requested him to show -his library. Descartes directed him to a place where he had dissected the dead body of a calf, and addressed the man: "This is my library. I have gained all my knowledge from `these' books".

The late Sayyid Jamal al-Din Asadabadi used to say: "It is quite strange that some people spend a long life studying the books and writings by their

fellow-human beings under the light of a lamp, but if they close the books one night and study the same lamp, they will acquire much more knowledge."

Nobody is born learned, Ali people are ignorant at the beginning and they become learned little by little. In other words, every person, with the exception of Allah (SWT), is ignorant himself but turns out to be knowledgeable by virtue of some other forces, causes and means. Thus, every individual is in need of an instructor - an inspiring force. Allah (SWT) speaks of the Holy Prophet (SA) in this respect in the following verse:

"Did He not find you an orphan and give you shelter? Did He not find you unable to see and show you the way? Did He not find you in need and make you free from need?" (93: 6-8)

But, in principle, who and what should the instructor be? Does the man out of necessity have to acquire knowledge from another of his fellow beings? If so, then he would essentially have the key to the knowledge of others (ie, "literacy") at his disposal. Is the man not in a position to be the initiator himself? Can he not study the book of nature and creation independent of others? Is the man not in a position commune with the ghayb (invisible) and the kingdom of heaven, and Allah (SWT) directly becomes his instructor and guide? The Holy Qur'an clarifies this in respect of the Prophet (SA):

"Nor does he speak out of desire. This is naught but revelation that is revealed; the Lord of Mighty Power has taught him (53: 3-5). "

Imam `Ali (AS) speaks about the Holy Prophet (SA):

"Allah (SWT) had appointed His most honourable angel to look after him since his very childhood. The angel led him to noble ways and manners and the best morals of the world."^[13]

In his outstanding "Al-Muqaddamah (Introduction)", Ibn Khaldun regards the perfection of writing to lie in the fact that man leads a social life, ie, members of human society need the knowledge of one another. He depicts the evolutionary course of writing in different civilizations and after pointing out the advent of writing in Hijaz, continues thus:

"In the early days of Islam, writing enjoyed its initial forms so far as its technical aspect was concerned, and the ways of writings of Prophet's Companions were undoubtedly defective. However, their followers and successors retained the same ways of writing and regarded them as sacred and honourable in transcribing the Holy Qur'an, without making any alterations, though some ways were in distinct opposition to the rules of writing. Consequently, some of the Qur'anic terms and phrases remained in a specific form of writing."

Ibn Khaldun adds:

"We should not be mistaken about the difference between perfection in technical and practical matters, including prescribed forms of writing, which are relative and dependent on means of

living, and the absolute perfection, the lack of which creates real defects in man's humanity."

He then sets forth the issue of the Prophet's unletteredness and concludes:

"The Prophet was untaught, and being untaught was an accomplishment for him, for he had received his knowledge from the heavens. But for us, being untaught means defect and imperfection, for it indicates our very ignorance."^[14]

Other Qur'anic verses to which Dr `Abd al-Latif refers are 3rd and 4th verses of Surat al-Bayyinah. He says: "It is quite strange that the translators and commentators of the Holy Qur'an have been heedless of these verses about the Holy Prophet (SA), in which Allah (SWT) says:

'(Muhammad) a messenger from Allah, reciting pages purified, therein true Books'. We should take into consideration the fact that in these verses it is not mentioned that the Holy Prophet (SA) narrated the holy "suhuf" (ie, pages) by heart. It is rather stipulated that he read from the texts."(98:3-4)

The answer to this reasoning will be clear when the meanings of the two words (ie, "Sahifah" and "yatlu") in the above-mentioned verses are understood. The meaning of the verses is: "The Holy Prophet (SA) reads to the people some purified pages on which there are true and everlasting writings." Now, since the "pages" here means the very sheets on which the Qur'anic verses were recorded, it is obvious that the Holy Prophet (SA) recited the Holy Qur'an for the people.

The word "yatlu" (from the root "tilawah") does not have the sense, "reading from a text" and nowhere has it been so employed. A consideration of various applications of the words "tilawah" and "qira'ah" makes it clear that not every kind of expression can be called "tilawah" or "qira'ah". Rather, these words are employed in cases where the material read is related to a certain text, regardless of being read from memory or from the text.

For instance, reciting the Holy Qur'an is both "tilawah" and "qira'ah" whether it is recited from the text of the Qur'an or from one's memory. There is a difference, of course, between the two, that is, "tilawah" is used when reading a holy text but "qira'ah" can be applied to any reading, holy or unholy sort of written material. As an example, in case of reading Sa'di's "Gulistan" only "qira'ah" can be used, and not "tilawah".

At any rate, whether one reads from the text or from the memory, it does not have anything to do with the concepts of "tilawah" and "qira'ah". Thus, the above-mentioned verses indicate no more than the fact that the Prophet (SA) read to the people the Qur'anic verses which were recorded on some sheets. And there was essentially no need for the Prophet (SA) to read the verses of the Qur'an from the text while hundreds of Muslims recite them from the memory.

Had the Prophet (SA) not memorized the Holy Qur'an? In fact, Allah (SWT) had guaranteed his memory. In Surat Al-'A'la, the Holy Qur'an says:
"We shall make you recite so you shall not forget (87:6)."

It is thus clear that one cannot conclude from the Qur'anic verses that the Prophet (SA) of Allah (SWT) was able to read and write. Rather, contrary to this fact can be concluded. Even if we conclude on the basis of the Qur'anic verses to that effect, it would be something belonging to the prophetic period, whereas Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif's claim is that the Prophet (SA) was .able to read and write before his appointment as a prophet

Historical Facts And Ahadith

Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif claims that it is possible to prove, through historical facts and traditions, that the Prophet (SA) used to read and write. He supports this by two facts.

(1) He states: "Al-Bukhari relates within the narrations and ahadith recorded in the Chapter: "Al-Ilm" (the knowledge that the Prophet (SA) gave 'Ali, his son-in-law, a secret letter and told specifically not to open it, but have the name of the recipient in his mind and hand him over the letter. Who else other than the Prophet could have written the letter while even 'Ali, his son-in-law and his trusted person did not know its content?[15]

Unfortunately, the narration in Sahih al-Bukhari does not mention 'Ali's (AS) name as the carrier of the letter, whereas Dr `Abd al-Latif concludes that the Prophet (SA) himself had written the letter, on the basis that he kept its contents a secret even to 'Ali (AS): In Sahih al-Bukhari, Chapter "Al-Ilm" Al-Bukhari asserts: "The Prophet set off a group of people and handed a letter to their commander and asked him not to open it before he arrived at a certain place."

He does not say that their commander was 'Ali (AS). The contents of the narration reveal, in addition, that the one to open it should have been the carrier of the letter not a third person, as assumed by Dr `Abd al-Latif. What Al-Bukhari has narrated is really connected with a story called "Batn al-Nakhlah" recorded in books of history and Prophetic traditions.

Both Ibn Hisham's "Sirah "[16](under the title: `Abdullah ibn Jahsh's sariyyah) and Bihar al-Anwar [17] relate the same narration that the carrier of the letter was `Abdullah ibn Jahsh. It is said that the Prophet (SA) asked him to open the letter after two days' journey and do as it instructed, and he did so and acted upon the Messenger of Allah's command.

Al-Waqidi's "Al-Maghazi" states in explicit terms that Ubay ibn Ka'b was the writer of the letter, not the Holy Prophet (SA). It says:

"Abdullah ibn Jahsh said: `Once, after the Salat al-Isha' (night prayer), the Prophet asked me to come to him the next morning early, armed and ready, to be sent on a mission. The next day,

after the Salat al-Fajr (morning prayer), held in the mosque in congregation under the leadership of the Prophet, I was standing near the Prophet's house armed and prepared. Some other Companions were present there too like me. The Prophet summoned Ubay ibn Ka'b and ordered him to write a letter. Then, he handed me over the closed letter and said: 'You are the commander of these people. Open this letter after two nights of journey on the mentioned path, and act as it instructs.' I did what I had been told after two days and noticed that I had been ordered to go to Batn al-Nakhlah (a place between Makkah and Waif) to obtain necessary information about the Quraysh's caravan.

In addition, I had been advised not to compel any of the men to accompany me in the task. Of course, it was a dangerous mission. I told my friends that whoever is ready for the martyrdom could accompany me, and that the remaining were free to go back. They all unanimously remarked: We all heard and shall obey Allah, His Prophet and you.' [18]

Accordingly, what Dr `Abd al-Latif has based his claim on is totally unfounded.

(2) Dr `Abd al-Latif further states: "As narrated by Al-Bukhari and Ibn Hisham..., the Prophet (SA) wrote the treaty by his own hand."

Firstly, Al-Bukhari has quoted this in one narration and has related the contrary in another. Secondly, Sunni scholars have almost unanimously asserted that although Al-Bukhari's statement apparently indicates that the Prophet (SA) himself has written it, this has not been the intention of the narrator. Al-Halabi's "Sirah", narrates the story in the same manner and even states: "The Holy Prophet asked `Ali to delete the words: "Allah's Messenger'." but adds, quoting narration of Al-Bukhari, that some have taken this as a miracle carried out by the Prophet (SA).

It, however, mentions afterward: "Some have said that this narration is not acceptable by some knowledgeable persons. It actually implies that the Prophet ordered someone to write and that he did not write it himself."

He adds: "Abul-Walid Baji Maliki from Spain, who intended to rely on the apparent meaning of Al-Bukhari's statement was seriously refuted by the Spanish scholars." [19]

However, Ibn Hisham's "Sirah" does not include such a statement and it is not clear as why did Dr `Abd al-Latif ascribe this to Ibn Hisham.' We have already mentioned that from the historical point of view, what is inferred from most narrations, is that `Ali (AS) wrote all the written material. That the Prophet (SA) wrote, despite his inability to write, can only be concluded from Al-Tabari's and Ibn Al-Athir's statements.

At the most this can be implied that the Prophet (SA) wrote once or more during the prophetic period, whereas, the issue under discussion concerns the period before his prophethood

The Adversaries' Accusation

It was mentioned at the very beginning of the book that: "The opponents of Islam and the Prophet (SA) accused him of borrowing ideas from others (this accusation is reflected from some verses of the Qur'an). But they did not say that he was literate and knew how to read and write and that he perhaps had some books which he consulted before presenting his views."

Someone might, however, claim that the Prophet (SA) was accused in this respect too. This reflected from the Qur'an where it says:

"They say: The stories of the ancient - he has got them written down - so that these are recited to him morning and evening (25: 5)".

The answer is that this verse does not explicitly indicate their claim that the Prophet (SA) used to write, regardless of the fact that the opponents' accusations were so prejudiced and based on complexes and grudges that, as the Holy Qur'an puts it, only terms like "injustice" and "oppression" can best be used for them. At the same time, the Arabic term "iktitab" means both 'to write' and "istiktab" ie, to make someone write something'.

Here, the second meaning applies to the verse which would mean "They said: 'he has written (or others have written for him) the stories of the ancient, then someone reads to him every morning and evening," "iktitab" is mentioned here in the past tense and "imla" in the present continuous.

It implies that someone wrote them, and that those who knew how to read, used to come to Prophet (SA) every day and night and read them to him, and that he learned and memorized them. Thus, if the Prophet (SA) knew how to read, they would not necessarily say that others used to read to him day and night; rather, it would suffice them to say that he himself referred to writings and memorized them.

Therefore, even the oppressive and accusing infidels of his time, who accused the Prophet (SA) in many ways and named him an insane, a sorcerer, a liar and an imitator of others' oral statements, etc, could not claim that he read the contents of other books to them due to his inability to read and write.

Conclusion

It is inferred from what has already been stated that according to the definite testimony of history, Qur'anic proofs and abundant indications deduced from the history of Islam, the Holy Prophet's (SA) mind was untouched by human teaching. He was a man taught only in the divine school and who received his knowledge from Him alone. He was a flower fostered by the Pre-eternal Gardener and none else.

Although Allah (SWT) has nothing to do with the pen, paper, ink, reading and writing, He swore

by the pen and its manifestations as a sacred matter in His Holy Book:

"Nun' I swear by the pen and what they write (68:1). "

Allah (SWT) also commanded "reading" in His ,first heavenly message and introduced the knowledge and art of using the pen as the greatest blessing bestowed on man after the

blessing of "creation". The Holy Qur'an states:

"Read in the name of your Lord Who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord is Most Honourable; Who taught (to write) with the pen; taught man what he knew not (96:1-5). "

In fact, the one who had not held a pen in his hand, established the "Pen Movement" immediately after his arrival in Madinah by providing simple facilities. Although he had neither been tutored by man nor had he attended any universities or the like, he turned out to be man's

teacher and the founder of universities. Hafiz remarks:

"Brightened and made Heaven's grace manifest,

He healed our wandering heart and our wounded chest.

He, who attended no school, was dear of mine,

Hundreds of tutors were taught with his knowledge, divine.

And his graceful glance filled the lovers with spirits raised,

The knowledge and wisdom both got amazed."

Imam 'Ali al-Rida (AS), in his discussion with the people following other religions, addressed Ra's al-Jalut: "Among the true reasons of his prophethood is that the Prophet was an orphan, a poor shepherd and a worker who had not read any books and had not been taught; yet, he brought a book in which there are the stories of prophets and the information regarding both past and future generations."[\[20\]](#)

What reveals more reasonably the loftiness, grandeur and heavenliness of the Holy Qur'an is the fact that this great divine Book, with myriad instructions concerning the creation, the Resurrection, human beings, morality, law, admonitory stories and sermons - with all its grace, beauty and eloquence - was issued from the tongue of the one who was himself unlettered, who neither attended any school or college nor received any university education and who

neither met any of his contemporary scholars nor read a simple book of his time.

The sign and miracle that Allah (SWT) granted to His last Prophet (SA) was the book and writing, of speech and meditation, and of feelings and senses. It deals with wisdom, thoughts, the heart and mind. This Holy Book has shown for centuries, and still shows, its extraordinary spiritual authority. The passage of time cannot make it obsolete.

It has fascinated, and continues to fascinate, millions and millions of hearts. It brims over with

a life-sustaining power. What thoughtful minds it has induced to meditation! What numerous hearts it has overflowed with spiritual enthusiasm!

What countless nightingales of dawn and those keeping a night vigil it has spiritually fed! What tears it has caused to flow on cheeks at midnight out of love for Allah (SWT) and fear of Him. And what enslaved and chained nations has it emancipated from the claws of tyranny and despotism.

The poet says:

"As the Qur'an's seal shone all and everywhere,
The Pope's plans it shattered and of the Magi's here and there.

Let's open what I really feel in essence,
It is not a simple book but has a difference.

It transforms into whosoever's soul it enters, Like the transformed soul, the world also alters.

It is clear like "truth", but hard to reach, Alive, everlasting, a manifest speech."

Yes, to enlighten more clearly that the Qur'an is a revelation and a miracle for the human beings Allah (SWT), the Everlasting Grace, revealed it to one among His servants who was an orphan, a poor shepherd and a desert-rover and an untaught and unschooled man.

" .("That is Allah's grace; He grants it to whom He wills, and Allah is of abounding bounty (62:4

Notes

1. Al-Raghib Al-Isfahani, Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an Al-Taqqaddum al-'Arabi Press, November 1972, under the word "umm" and Exegesis of the Holy Quran : Majma' al-Bayan, under the verse 78 of Surat Al-Baqarah.
2. Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an: "Majma' al-Bayan, verse 78 of "Surat Al-Baqarah ".
3. Exegesis of the Holy Qur'an: Majma' al-Bayan, under the verse 75 of Surat Ali 'Imran and verse 157 of Surat Al-A'raf; and Tafsir al-Razi, under the verse 75 of Surat Al-A'raf.
4. The Magazine published by the Astani Qudsi Razavi, Mashhad, issue no 2.
5. Ibid
6. One of the narrations confirms the word "ummi" as a derivative of "Umm al-Qura" meaning Makkah, although the word "Umm al-Qura" is a common attribute and not a proper noun. The narration states: "The Prophet was known as "Umami" because he was an inhabitant of Makkah and Makkah is one of the "Umm al-Quras"
7. The publication of the society of the Headclerks, issue of October 1965 (copied from the publication of the Ministry of Education and Training, September 1965).
8. Bihar al-Anwar, new impression, vol 2, p 151.
9. Al-Kafi, vol 1, p 403.

10. Bihar al-Anwar, vol 2, p 144

11. Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol 3, p 134

12. Husayn Al-Diyar Bakri, Tarikh al-Khami", vol 1, p 395; and "Al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah", vol 2, p 204

13. Nahj al-Balaghah" Sermon No 190

14. Ibn Khaldun, Al Muqaddamah (Introduction)", Ibrahim Hilmi Press, p 494, 495.

15. Sahih al-Bukhari, vol 1, p 25

16. Ibn Hisham, S'irah, vol 1, p 601

17. Bihar al-Anwar, old edition, vol 6, p 575

18. Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Waqidi, Al-Maghazi, vol 1, p 13.

19. Al-Sirah al-Halabiyyah, vol 3, p 24.

.20. `Uyun Akhbar al-Rida, p 94