

Scientific Quarterly
Journal of Ahl al-Bayt (as) Teachings
Vol. 1, Issue 1, Spring & Summer 2023

Textual Analysis of the Term *Ummī*: A New Perspective

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(Received: June 04, 2023, Accepted: September 20, 2023)

Abstract

The Arabic word *ummī* is commonly translated as "unlettered." In the Qur'an, Muhammad is described as "*ummī*" and traditionally this has meant for Muslims that Muhammad was illiterate, completely unable to read or write. Thus, the fact that he was able to recite the Qur'an should be regarded as miracle (*ijāz*) and evidence that it really does have a divine origin. This paper, according to the verses of the Qur'an and historical evidence, proves that *ummī* should not be taken to mean illiterate, but rather scriptureless. This would mean that when Muhammad is described as *ummī*, it denotes the fact that he is not one of the People of the Book or simply that he is not a member of a group which has already received a revelation from God - at least, not until he received the Qur'an.

Keywords: *Ummī*, Literacy, Illiteracy, Followers of the Book, Immigration of Jews, Concealing the Fact.



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Introduction

"*Ummī*" is one of the very important concepts which have been a source of controversy and debate, due to the various interpretations given to it. In this essay, after pointing out different interpretations of the word, criticism of ideas and views about it will be presented.

Definition of "*Ummī*"

Islamic commentators say that the word has three meanings:

1. Illiterate and unfamiliar with writing.

The majority is the supporter of this theory or at least prefers it. The advocators of this view have said the word *ummī* is related to "umm" which means mother. *ummī* means the one who has remained in congenital condition.

In terms of his information about writings and human's data, be they his own or attributed to his nation, it means one who is accustomed to the majority of people. But the majority of the time did not know how to read and write and just a few of his Meccan contemporaries (about sixteen) knew. It also means an uneducated person who is ignorant and illiterate. (Raghib, p. 18-20; Tabarsi, Interpretation of the verse 78, Sura Baqarah).

1. Some have said one of the meanings of *ummah* is creation and *ummī* means one who has remained in his congenital condition which is an uneducated and illiterate situation (Tabarsi, Interpretation of the verse 78, Sura Baqarah). Whether derived from *umm* or from *ummah* or creation, the meaning of this word is illiterate.

2. (ام القرى) *Umm al-Qurá*, the People of Mecca.

Supporters of this theory say that this word is related to (*Umm al-Qurá*) which is Mecca. "*Umm al-Qurá*" in the Sura An'ām, verse 93 has been known to refer to Mecca:

«ولتتذر ام القرى و من حولها»: "That thou mayst warn the Mother of Villages and those around her"

This Possibility has been mentioned in the books of interpretation (Tabarsi, Interpretation of the verse 156, Sura 'Arāf; Fakhr Razi, Interpretation of the verse 75, Sura A'rāf) and several *Hadith* have confirmed this possibility.



3. The Arabs (i.e. non-Jewish and non-Christian Arabs) who were not the people of a valid scripture. This idea always has existed between the commentators.

In *tafsir* "Majma' al-Bayan", Sura Ālī 'Imrān, verse 21, it is said that *ummīyyin* were against *Ahlul-Kitāb*: "and say to those were given the scripture (Jews and Christians) and to those who are *ummīyyin*", according to a view attributed to Abdullah Ibn Abbas, one of the great Companions and commentators and following the verse 78 of Sura Baqarah, the commentator Tabarsi narrates this view from Abu Ubaydah; and in the interpretation of the verse 75 of Ālī 'Imrān, Tabarsi apparently has chosen this meaning.

Zamakhshari in *Kashshaf* has the same interpretation in this verse and the verse 75 of Sura Ālī 'Imrān, and Fakhr Razi quotes this possibility in the interpretation of the verse 78, Sura Baqarah and verse 20, Sura Ālī 'Imrān.

The commentators have mentioned three possibilities for the meaning of (*ummī*) and the majority of them have chosen the same meaning of uneducated and illiterate and often based on the derivative (Umm) or in the sense of a newborn who knows nothing about reading and writing.

What we seek to address is that this seemingly degrading term "illiterate" which has been attributed to Prophet on behalf of the Jews and Christians or Islamic theologians is based on two principles:

1- Historical evidence (History of the Arab and Mecca, contemporaneous with the emergence of Islam) and Traditions that exist in this field in history books, especially in the Qur'anic Sciences books.

2 - Verses of the Qur'an in which the word *ummī* has been used in a singular or plural form.

First: Regarding the first principle of those who advocate the illiteracy of the Prophet, the point that should not be neglected is that against all historical evidence which supporters of this theory, there are is some historical evidence which explicitly refers to the idea that the Prophet could read, at least after the Prophecy (Hojjati, p. 189-193).



The opposed Traditions of this theory questions the conclusiveness of these evidences. The traditions or other evidence of those who interpret the term as “illiteracy”, remain inconclusive because the scrutiny of evidences and Traditions casts doubt on their traditional and historical evidences.

Second: Those who uphold the above interpretation as referring to the illiteracy of Prophet says: Islamic commentators more or less differ on the concept of the word of *ummī* in the verses of Sura A‘rāf but in the meaning of the following verse which implies illiteracy of the Prophet they have no disagreement. Allah the Almighty in sura ‘Ankabūt, verse 48 says:

«وما كنت تتلوا من قبله من كتاب ولا تخطه بيمينك اذا لارتاب المبطلون»

The verse is: “And you did not recite before it any book, nor did you transcribe one with your right hand, for then could those who say untrue things have doubted.”

This verse is clear that before the mission the Prophet was neither reading nor writing. Muslim commentators generally interpret this verse too as meaning that the Prophet could neither write nor read both before the Revelation of Qur’an and after, and that he has not written any inscriptions, for had he done that it would cast doubt on the Qur’an. But this deduction is rejected based on the following reasons:

1. As they say, commentators disagree about the meaning of verses of Sura A‘rāf in which there is the term of *ummī*. A reliable point for those who believe in the illiteracy of the Prophet is verse (‘Ankabūt, 48) which in their opinion explicitly refers to the Prophet being uneducated. However, this verse seeks only to express that the Prophet should stay safe from slanders and nonsense and that he did not read nor write anything. The question arises how has the illiteracy of the Prophet has been deduced from this verse.

For a better understanding of this sense, again every single words of this verse should be meditated upon and we must ask: if "*Talavah*" means ‘not reading from the scripture and lack of writing to prevent doubt and skepticism’, what is obstacle in accepting the possibility that the Prophet was aware of any skills of reading and writing, but that, in order to stay safe from scandal, he avoided writing and reading?

Moreover, this verse is not going to express that the Prophet was not able to read or write. Rather it states only that the Prophet did not read or write anything (Raghib, p. 71-72).

The negation in this verse is related to reading and writing from a book and this negation has not been awarded to the Prophet's ability of reading and writing. It means that the Prophet, despite the ability of reading and having writing skills, for the sake of protection and being safe from doubt and slander, neither wrote nor read anything in public.

This type of interpretation cannot be considered strange, for the historians and those familiar with the scientific and practical tradition of the Prophet know that the Prophet was a capable poet and lecturer so that his sermons which have been related are our evidence. However, he never wrote a poem nor placed himself in scandal and libel. And now there is the question if we have not heard or received poem from the Prophet must we warrant that the Prophet did not know the techniques of poetry? Because of the same reason that no poem or poetic speech has been quoted, equally we say that the Prophet before the mission did not write anything and nor read for the slander and doubt stays closed forever.

2. In this verse, reciting from a book has been denied and *book* means what has been written, whether a letter or a volume, sacred and heavenly or non-sacred and terrestrial; indefinite of this verse also explicitly indicates this subject.

Therefore, the word (من كتاب) does not refer only to the reading of the Scripture verses. But the word (*Ez'a*) in this phrase shows that if the prophet was writing or reading then nonsense and uncertainty were arisen. However, neither from the first part of verse nor from the second it does not follow that the Prophet was not able to write or read, rather this negation only denies the reading from a Book and is not a reason for illiteracy of the Prophet.

3 - lack of any historical evidences that the Prophet went to a school (though contemporaneous with the emergence of Islam, there is no any school) and there is no historically authentic Hadith in this regard that the Prophet has learned reading and writing from someone else is a reason for this claim that the Prophet who was given a huge global



mission and He should take this mission on his shoulder till the resurrection, must have received the mission areas and has been aware of possible obstacles so that after the Revelation of Qur'an has not been accused that because of his communication with Jewish scholars and Christians he has produced a Qur'an and then attributed it to Allah the Almighty.

Some traditions state that the Prophet from childhood until the age of discernment has been under an especially occult protection and the Prophet himself admitted to this matter in some cases (Beyhaghi, Al-Sunan al-Kubrá, 1404 AH). Based on this special protection, the Prophet before mission did not read or write anything so that after the critiques, the principles and basis of the Divine Word stays safe from nonsense and slanders.

4- Apart from the subjects that were previously presented, does it matter the Prophet who was under the moral education and has been prepared to receive divine revelation to learn literacy and write from non-routine ways and have learned from the occult disciplines. (And historical evidence indicates that before the mission the Prophet did not refer to someone else for learning the techniques of reading and writing). Moreover reading and writing is a value even though some believe that it is not so for the Prophet, as ability to read and write for the Prophet is not considered a value like worship, sacrifice, virtue because literacy for human beings is considered and also known as an extremely valuable education which is a means to use the information of the others but God is directly a teacher and conductor of Him, because God states:

«و ما ينطق عن الهوي ، ان هو الا وحي يوحى علمه شديد القوى»

“Nor does he say (aught) of (his own) Desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him; He was taught by one Mighty in Power.” (Najm, 3-5).

In reply we must say that it is not related to the issue we discussed about because it does not matter whether the Prophet learned from God or was taught by another human. However, the mere knowledge of reading and writing skills can be considered as a value and because of that the movement of the Prophet was a pen movement and the first

verse of Sura 'Alaq that starts with (*iqra'*) discusses education and or Sura Nūn, verse 1, in which Allah the Almighty take an oath to Pen and states:

(ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ): Nun, by the pen and that which they write (therewith).

Here the Qur'an is not going to speak about where the Prophet learned the techniques of reading and writing from. Rather if it speaks on this issue as if the literacy is not value, then why did the Prophet create such a movement which caused a group of illiterate people in Medina to learn several languages, and they could convey the message of Islam with various languages around the world?

The Prophet, after getting the ransom from the prisoners, allowed them to get released. Some of them who were poor were released without ransom and he contracted with some of them who were literate that if they train 10 persons of children or Muslims of Medina, then they will be released. The Prophet that insisted so much on the literacy of Muslim and always enforce:

“Seek Knowledge even in China.” (اطلبوا العلم ولو في الصين) (Beyhaghi, Al-Sunan al-Kubrā, 1404 AH).

But none of these things requires that the Prophet should be informed and awarded for reading and writing? Or even be a proactive in this matter?

We believe no one has not being born as a learned and lettered and certainly everyone needs a teacher and requires an educator that inspired him. We believe that the teacher of the Prophet is not necessarily a human being, who would teach him the whole Knowledge of man (as an education) from him. Rather for the Prophet with high Heavenly degree that has a connection with the unseen, surely the God is a directly His teacher as the Qur'an states:

“Nor does he say (taught) of (his own) Desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him; He was taught by one Mighty in Power.” (Najm, 3-5)

The origin of the view of illiteracy of the Prophet (pbuh)

The origin of the idea that the Prophet must be illiterate is related to the discussion of the miracle of the Qur'an. Some of the experts in



Qur'anic sciences say: In addition to historical evidence, the Holy Qur'an declares that the Prophet was unfamiliar with reading and representing of Qur'an through Him is a reason for the Miracles of Qur'an. Then he adds: but the reason is: How can someone believe that one who has not seen the school and teacher be able to bring such a Book which made the linguists of Arabic surprised and then invited all of human beings to bring its similar, but no one could bring a book like the Qur'an; and is this not a reason that the Qur'an has been revealed from God to the Prophet? (Ma'aref, p. 84-86)

With a careful and deep meditation on these words, we find that the discussion of illiteracy of the Prophet and the miracles of the Qur'an has been possibly mixed when they did not find a way for understanding the miracle of Qur'an, therefore they attempted to find out the secret miracle of Qur'an outside of Qur'an instead of within it!

All experts and scholars on the issue of miracle of the Qur'an know that whatever the miracle of Qur'an is that related to be the Word of God and therefore should be searched inside the Qur'an itself. And for proving the miracle of Qur'an no reason at all has been required to talk about the pagans, the ignorance era coincides with the emergence of Islam that was full of corruption and notice to the outside environment of Qur'an but look at the Qur'an itself as a miracle and we do not need to prove the miracle of the Word of God with the illiteracy of the Prophet and it is not appreciated at all to promote the position of Qur'an by lowering the position of the Prophet!

The miracle of the Qur'an should be searched within the Qur'an.

Some scholars' opinion that the revelation of Qur'an on an illiterate person made the Arab surprised and impressed them is a baseless claim because the word of God itself is His truthful guidance and its expression impressed the Arab, not the revelation of a transcendent word on an illiterate messenger. Even if the Prophet were the most literate of people and Qur'an was revealed to him still the word of God would not be under question and doubt because the eloquent and linguists of the Arabs despite the higher literacy, have not been able to bring the like of it yet, for the type of language of the Divine Word basically is not from the type of language of human beings, so illiteracy

of the Prophet is not a reason for the greatness of the Qur'an and it is not involved in the miracle of Qur'an.

New Perspective:

As we mentioned in the first part of debate about the meaning of the word (*ummī*) there are three views which regarding the evidences and reasons we presented, were rejected. We believe that contrary to the believers of illiteracy of the Prophet, the verse:

«وماكنت تتلوا من قبله من كتاب ولا تخطه بيمينك اذا لارتاب المبطلون»

is not going to say this at all and the word of *ummī* in other verses of Sura A'rāf has been disputed by the scholars and Qur'an commentators. We believe that *ummī* either singular or as a plural form refers to non-Jewish and non-Christians Arabs and there is some verses and historical evidences which prove this claim and there are some witness to this claim, so giving the history and causes of Jewish migration to Arabia and presenting the ethical and ethnic characteristics of them, and by resorting to the verses we prove that God in terms of opposition to Jewish and their wrong belief that the Last Prophet will be raise from among the Jews, explicitly emphasized: (Jumu'ah, 2)

« وهو الذي بعث في الاميين رسولا منهم يتلوا عليهم آياته ويزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتاب والحكمه وان كانوا من قبل لفي ضلال مبين»

“It is He Who has sent amongst the *ummīyyin* an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, - although they had been, before, in manifest error.”

The causes of Jews immigration to the Arabia

One of very important debates about the conflict of illiteracy of the Prophet is paying attention to the reasons of the Jewish immigration to Arabia. There are various theories about why some Jews migrated to Arabia:

1. When Bukhtal-Nasr, the king of Assyria, attacked to Palestine, Jews were driven out from their country, some of them went to Arabia and inhabited there (Amin, p. 15). When this group entered the Hejaz expelled Amalaghe and Jarhamiyan then get their own farms and settled in Wadi al-Gura, Tima and Yasrib. Some says that a group of these people died (Balazeri, p. 22).



2. In 70 AD, after Titus attacked on Jewish temple, some of them were displaced from Palestine (Artold, p. 6; Moghaddasi, vol. 4, p. 109) and then they were severely tortured by Adrian Roman, so in 132 AD a number of Jews went out of His Land to Arabia which was a safe place (Port, John Dion; P. 5)

3. Judaism and Christianity through contact with neighboring civilized nations entered to this land (Taha, p. 5).

4. According to another theory, the first Jews arrived in land of Arabia in search of pasture (Zarrin Koob, p. 221).

Development increasing of Jews in Palestine created a situation which for other activities of their life was not enough, then forced to move to the nearby Lands such as Egypt, Iraq and Arabia (Tabbareh, p. 18).

5. Some says that possibly basic core of this group were Jews who fled in first century AD when the Romans occupied Palestine and perhaps that were the Aramaic language Jews who converted the name of "Yasreb" to "Madinata". All the cases are listed here refers to the Jews immigration to the Hejaz that immigrants arrived from the north and then considered the southern parts of Arabia (Ali, Javad, p. 512).

However, there is no effect of written work about Arabia Jewish to support their past (Fathi and al-Sabih Mohammad, p. 290). So the reasons for the immigration of Jews to the Arabia remains only in the stage of some diffused theories.

But among these theories there are some narratives which mention that the awareness for the emergence of a new prophet was a cause for the Jewish immigration to this area. Also the Jews preferred Judaism to other religions and this can be another cause for their immigration (Majlisi, vol. 15, p. 204. hadith 20, p. 206; hadith 24, p. 214).

The following verses confirm these narratives based on knowledge of Jewish immigrants from the emergence of new Prophet:

1. Jewish Racism

One of the implausible characteristics of Jewish is racial prejudice as it supposes that they are superior to others and according to their opinion all types and people are considered to be their slaves.

One reason for Jewish sabotage against the Prophet was that the Prophet did not differentiate between Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Arab

and *Ajam*; but knew "*Taqwa*" (God-weariness) as a criterion for value. Holy Qur'an states (Baqarah, 80):

«وقالوا لن تمسنا النار الا اياما معدودة قل اتخذتم عند الله عهدا فلن يخلف الله عهده ام تقولون علي الله مالا تعلمون»

(And they say: "The Fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days:" Say: "Have you taken a promise from God, for He never breaks His promise? Or is it that ye say of God what ye do not know?")

Jews believe that even in the Hereafter, this racial score comes to help them and unlike others they will have only a short penalty and a light punishment in the Hereafter (Tabari, vol. 1, p. 540). Holy Qur'an in sura Nisá, verse 123 states:

« ليس باما نيكم و لا امانى اهل الكتاب من يعمل سوء يجز به ولا يجد له من دون الله وليا ولا نصيرا »

“(This) shall not be in accordance with your vain desires nor in accordance with the vain desires of the followers of the Book; whoever does evil, he shall be requited with it, and besides Allah he will find for himself neither a guardian nor a helper.”

2. Betrayal of Jewish scholars and concealing the facts

another reason which indicates that the Jewish had been aware of emergence of the Prophet is the Holy Qur'an. Verse 159 and Verse 146 of Sura Baqarah explicitly point out to this matter. The Qur'an states that Jewish scholars such knew the accurate traits of the Prophet in the Old Testament, and that as soon as they saw the Prophet they knew Him. The Qur'an stated (Baqarah, 146):

«الذين آتيناهم الكتاب يعرفونه كما يعرفون ابناءهم و ان فريقا منهم ليكنتمون الحق وهم يعلمون»

“Those whom We have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons, and a party of them most surely conceal the truth while they know (it).” (Baqarah, 146)

When Abdullah Ibn Salam accepted Islam he said: " I know the Prophet better than my son" (Zamakhshari, vol. 1, p. 2).

In the verse above (Baqarah, 146) a very interesting point is noted that the traits of physical and mental characteristics of the Prophet clearly have stated in the Book of Jewish so that if someone be familiar



to their Books completely knows the Prophet (Makarem, vol. 1, p. 500). However, some Jewish scholars intentionally and in full awareness concealed their knowledge about the Prophet (Tabatabaie, vol. 1, p. 322).

Jewish scholars not only hide these facts but ordered the Jewish people to conceal the facts (sobhani, vol. 6, p. 284). The Holy Qur'an states (Baqarah, 76-77):

«و اذا لقوا الذين آمنوا قالوا آمنا و اذا خلا بعضهم الي بعض قالوا اتحدثونهم بما فتح الله عليكم ليحاجوكم به عند ربكم افلا تعقلون او لا يعلمون ان الله يعلم ما يسرون وما يعلنون»
 "Behold! When they meet the men of Faith, they say: "We believe": But when they meet each other in private, they say: "Shall you tell them what God hath revealed to you, that they may engage you in argument about it before your Lord?"- Do ye not understand (their aim)? Know they not that God knoweth what they conceal and what they reveal?"

Some of the commentators has quoted from Imam Baqir (as): "When a group of Jews who had no enmity with the Muslims, saw in the Torah about the traits of the Prophet, they came to the Muslims and gave them the news; Jewish elders prohibited them from this and said: do not say the traits of the Mohammad in the Torah for them for these will be their reason against you." (Tabatabaie, vol. 1, p. 212 and Tabarsi, vol. 1, p. 272).

As deduced from the Qur'an and Traditions, the Jewish scholars prior to the mission, knew the signs and traits of the Prophet, even other tribes such as the Ows and Khazraj were heard from the Jews those signs and when the Jews saw injustice from Arabia tribes were saying to them: "If our Prophet whose news has come in the Torah after raising (according to the Torah) will migrate to Medina, he will save us from the humiliation and evil doing of the Arabs." (Tabatabaie, vol. 1, p. 212-220)

Jews, before the migration of Prophet were wishing the Prophet to come, but when the Prophet went for his mission to the Jews of Medina, they disbelieved the signs and traits of the Prophet and refused the calls of Him (Majlisi, vol. 19, p. 112). Therefore, divine revelation was revealed about the plot and their unbelief to the Prophet, it said (Baqarah, 89):



«ولما جاءهم كتاب من عند الله مصدق لما معهم كانوا من قبل يستفتحون علي الذين كفروا فلما جاءهم ما عرفوا كفروا به فلعنه الله علي الكافرين»

“And when there comes to them a Book from God, confirming what is with them - although form of old they had prayed for victory against those without Faith, - when there comes to them that which they (should) have recognized, they refuse to believe in it but the curse of God is on those without Faith.”

These verses fully revealed the fact that according to Jewish racism, and despite their detailed knowledge of all characteristics of the Prophet, they would not believe him. According to their opinion the Prophet is considered to have risen from among them and their race. As we mentioned before, Jews emigrated to Arabia because the Jews were already aware of the last Prophet's mission in this valley, but then for racist reasons emigrated to Arabia in the hope that the promised Prophet was raised from among them and insisting on their own belief went so far that although the last Prophet had been raised with the same characteristics which were mentioned in the Torah, they still did not believe him and even concealed the signs of the Prophet in the Torah. The Jews do not believe in the Prophet who was not sent among them; that is why that they believe they are the only ones who will enter heaven. The Qur'an refers to this (Baqarah, 111):

«وقالوا لن يدخل الجنة الا من كان هودا او نصاري تلك امانتهم قل هاتوا برهانكم ان كنتم صادقين»

“And they say: None shall enter the garden (or paradise) except he who is a Jew or a Christian. These are their vain desires. Say: Bring your proof if you are truthful.”

The superior nature of Jewish racism went so far as they not only claimed that they are the children of God but denied the whole prophecy. "Rāf'i Ibn Huraymalah" and "Vahāb Ibn Yahūdā" the two Jewish elders said to Muslims: "we have not told you such a thing and God has never sent a Prophet". Replying to their claim, this verse was revealed to the Prophet (Mā'idah, 19):

«يا اهل الكتاب قد جاءكم رسولنا يبين لكم علي فتره من الرسل ان تقولوا ما جاءنا من بشير ولا نذير فقد جاءكم بشيرو نذير والله علي كل شيء قدير»



“O People of the Book! Now hath come unto you, making (things) clear unto you, Our Apostle, after the break in (the series of) our apostles, lest ye should say: "There came unto us no bringer of glad tidings and no warner (from evil)": But now hath come unto you a bringer of glad tidings and a warner (from evil). And God hath power over all things.”

Of course, a cause of opposition of Jewish with the Prophet are rooted in their jealousy, the Jews not only did not accept Islam, but insisted that the believers should return from their faith as Allah the Most Exalted says (Bagharah, 109):

«ودكثير من اهل كتاب لو يردونكم من بعد ايمانكم كفارا حسدا من عند انفسهم من بعد ما تبين لهم الحق...»

“Quite a number of the People of the Book wish they could Turn you (people) back to infidelity after ye have believed, from selfish envy, after the Truth hath become Manifest unto them: But forgive and overlook, till God accomplishes His purpose; for God Hath power over all things.”

Some commentators say the cause of Jewish envy to the Muslims was because of transferring of Prophethood from the descendants of Isaac to the descendants of Ismail and transfer of presidency from the Jews to the Muslims (Tabarsi, vol. 1, p. 347).

These set of reasons and the verses of Qur'an clearly demonstrates the fact of Jewish immigration to Arabia and they were aware of the emergence of the Prophet. Their racism and jealousy as the Qur'an explicitly referred to that, forced them to migrate to Arabia in the hope that the Prophet has been raised from among them.

Conclusion

Ummī is a Term

With all this explanation is quite clear that the words "*ummī* and *ummīyyoon*" are terms against The People of Scripture (Jews and Christians) and it means that for the Jews who were called the People Scripture, it clear that the last Prophet is synchronous among them but none of them. In the Qur'an verses, wherever the word "*ummī* or *ummīyyoon*" is used (except one verse) that is a term for a nation against the People of Scripture. For an instance, In the verses of 157–158 Sura

Aʿrāf and in the verse of 21 Sura Ālī ʿImrān, the word: «اهل كتاب» is mentioned alongside of «امي»:

«الذين يتبعون الرسول النبي الامي الذي يجدونه مكتوبا عندهم في التوراه والانجيل...»

“Those who follow the Messenger-Prophet, the *ummī*, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Gospel” (Aʿrāf, 157).

«فامنوا باللهورسوله والنبي الامي الذي يومن بالله وكلماته واتبعوه لعلكم تهتدون.»

“Therefore believe in Allah and His messenger, the *ummī* Prophet who believes in Allah and His words, and follow him so that you may walk in the right way.” (Aʿrāf, 158).

«فان حاجوك فقل اسلمت وجهي لله و من اتبعن و قل للذين اوتوا الكتاب والاميين

ءاسلمتم فان اسلموا فقد اهتدوا و ان تولوا فانما عليك البلاغ والله بصير بالعباد.»

“But if they dispute with you, say: I have submitted myself entirely to Allah and (so) everyone who follows me; and say to those who have been given the Book and the *ummīyyin*: Do you submit yourselves? So if they submit then indeed they follow the right way; and if they turn back, then upon you is only the delivery of the message and Allah sees the servants.” (Al-Imran, verse 120)

Also in the verse 75 of the same Sura, the term «الأميون» regardless of its lexical meaning is mentioned alongside of «اهل»:

الكتاب»

«ومن اهل كتاب من ان تامنه بقنطار يؤده اليك ومنهم من ان تامنه بدينار لا يؤده اليك

الا مادمت عليه قائما ذلك بانهم قالوا ليس علينا في الاميين سبيل ويقولون علي الله الكذب وهم يعلمون»

“And among the followers of the Book there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a heap of wealth, he shall pay it back to you; and among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a dinar he shall not pay it back to you except so long as you remain firm in demanding it; this is because they say: There is not upon us in the matter of the *ummīyyin* any way (to reproach); and they tell a lie against Allah while they know.” (Ālī ʿImrān, 75)

«اهل الكتاب» in the Qur'an, is used in a lexical meaning? Now here is a question that whether if so and if this word has been applied in a lexical meaning, then the word "Ahlul-kitab" would mean that the all Jews were educated and literate, while the historical and Qur'anic evidences indicate that only a certain number of Jews were familiar with



reading and writing, and this issue does not apply to all Jews. The Jews and Christians were called "*Ahlul-Kitab*" for that they were the owner of Holy Book on the contrary of "*ummīyyin*".

This term does not mean the people who knew how to write and read but it means the nation or *ummah* which were owner of the Holy Book. For that reason, the Jews was calling the Arabs "*ummīyyin*" before revelation of Qur'an because they were not the owner of any Holy Book. Because of the name that the Jews coined, the Qur'an called the Arabs *ummī*.

Despite of the desire, enthusiasm and racism of Jews, the Prophet has been raised among *ummīyyin* and when the Jews saw their presidency in a great risk, they began to deny the Prophecy of Mohammad. The Qur'an in the verse 2 of Sura al-Jumu'ah stated:

«هو الذي بعث في الاميين رسولا منهم يتلوا عليهم آياته ويزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتاب والحكمة وان كانوا من قبل لفي ضلال مبين»

“It is He Who has sent amongst the *ummīyyin* an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom,- although they had been, before, in manifest error.” (Jumu'ah, 2)

And Qur'an in the same sura stated:

« ذلك فضل الله يؤتيه من يشاء والله ذو الفضل العظيم»

“Such is the Bounty of God, which He bestows on whom He will: and God is the Lord of the highest bounty.” (Jumu'ah, 4)

It means that the prophecy and mission of the Prophet is a divine grace and God knows better that His grace to whom grant and the efforts of Jews in taking of this virtue will be in waste and any carnal desires does not take place any more. The same chapter, verse 5, states:

«مثل الذين حملوا التوراه ثم لم يحملوها كمثل الحمار يحمل اسفارا بنس مثل القوم الذين كذبوا بايات الله والله لا يهدي القوم الظالمين»

“The similitude of those who were charged with the (obligations of the) Mosaic Law, but who subsequently failed in those (obligations), is that of a donkey which carries huge tomes (but understands them not). Evil is the similitude of people who falsify the Signs of God: and God guides not people who do wrong.” (Jumu'ah, 5)



as observed, the *ummīyyin* is a phrase against those who were possessor of Scripture and it became clear that the meaning of the "*ummī*" in the sense of Qur'an is not illiterate and uneducated but that is a term for non-Jews and Christians who were not the owner of Holy Book, this is also evident in the verses 78 and 79 of Sura Baqarah.

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