

A Strange Claim

It is a strange fact that in accordance with what a number of Iranian periodicals and publications¹ recorded for years ago, Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif – an Indian Muslim scholar from Hyderabad, India, the President of the Institute of Indian and Middle Eastern Cultural Studies, and President of the Academy for Islamic Studies at Hyderabad –delivered a detailed lecture on this issue in an Islamic conference in India. In this lecture, published in English, he claimed that the Prophet (SA) read and wrote even before his period of prophethood.

Publication of Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif's speech evoked a peculiar excitement among Iranian readers who then visited the religious authorities and posed questions to them. At that time, I delivered a brief speech on the issue for the students.

Keeping in view the general public's interest in this matter, and the fact that in Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif's speech there were facts which were very unexpected from a scholar and researcher of his calibre, I will now quote and discuss his speech. He has claimed that:

"(1) The reason for the observation that the Prophet (SA) neither read nor wrote is simply the misinterpretation of the word "ummi" meaning "unschooled" or "untaught". This word has been used in verses 157 and 158 of Surah 7 "Al-A'raf" of the Holy Qur'an to describe the Prophet (SA) The verse 157 reads: "Those who follow the unschooled Messenger Prophet." The verse 158 reads: "Therefore believe in Allah and His untaught Prophet". He observes that the interpreters believe that "ummi" means "untaught", when it does not.

(2) In the Qur'an there are other verses which clearly suggest that the Prophet (SA) both read and wrote.

(3) A number of authentic accounts and historical descriptions have recorded the clear fact that the Prophet (SA) both read and wrote."

This is an outline of the claims made by Dr Sayyid `Abd al-Latif. We will in turn, discuss and analyse these in the next three parts.

1. "Rawshanfikir", issue no 8 and 15, October 1965 and the Publication of the Society of the Headclerks. November 1965 (copied from the Publication of the Ministry of Education and Training, September 1965).

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