

CHAPTER II

GENERAL VIEW OF *UMMIY*

A. Understanding of *Ummiy*

1. Etymological Meaning

Etymologically, term *ummiy* refers to *illiterate man*, a man that cannot read anything. In addition, Ibnu Mandzur said that *ummiy* is a term to man that cannot write. Az-Zujaj added that *ummiy* is aimed to indicate people who follow the character of a group that don't learn any book and preserve the condition. In his opinion, Az-Zujaj grounded his explanation in emphasizing the term *ummiy* as the same root of term *ummah*.¹

Different from that opinion, Abu Ishaq emphasized more in the relation of word *ummiy* and *umm*, which means *mother*. Based from it, the meaning given to word *ummiy* really has strong relation to people's condition when they get born by their mothers, that know nothing including reading and writing.²

As explained in *al-Munjid* dictionary³, *al-ummiyyu* means *من لا يعرف الكتابة ولا القراءة* *man laa ya'riful kitabah wa lal qira'ah* (a man that cannot read and write). Whereas, the word *al-*

¹ Wan Zailan Kamaruddin Wan Ali, *Siapa itu Nabi-Nabi*, (Kuala Lumpur: PTS Millennia, 2007), P. 196

² Ibnu Manzur, *Lisanul al-Arab*, (Beirut, VII), P. 31

³ The writer of this dictionary, Louis Ma'luf, did not explain term *al-Ummiyyu* largely, and the editor also did not know the cause clearly.

Ummiy in *al-Mu'jam al-Wasith*⁴ has the same meaning with *al-ummu* (mother), *al-Ummah* (umat), or *من لا يقرأ ولا يكتب* *man laa yaqra'u wala yaktubu* (a man that cannot read and write). Besides, it also means *العمي الجاني* *al-'ayiyu al-Jaafi* (an uncommunicative man or a persistent man or a silly man). Therefore, the meaning of *ummiyyin* is illiterate people who cannot read and write. It is the condition of most Arabs in Muhammad PBUH era.⁵

Ibnu Arabi said that *ummiy* means a man that does not know how to read and write as when he was born. Al-Qur'an has explained it in verse an-Nahl: 78.⁶

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُم مِّن بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ
وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

It is He who brought you forth from the wombs of your when ye knew nothing; and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and that ye may give thanks (to Allah)

According to al-Murtadha al-Zabidi, *ummiy* has two meanings; they are a man that cannot read and write or a man that is taken along with the condition of a society that does not

⁴ Al-Mu'jam al-Wasith, juz 1, P. 48

⁵ Ahsin W. Alhafidz, M.A, *Kamus Ilmu Al-Qur'an*, (Jakarta: Amzah, 2006). See al-A'raf 157/158-ali Imran (20/75) al-Baqarah 78-al-Jumu'ah 2. P. 302

⁶ Ibnu Arabi, *Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, III, P. 1535

learn any book.⁷ Hasan ibn Sabith explained that illiteration of Muhammad PBUH must be understood symbolically to emphasize the truth of al-Qur'an as God's revelation. Thus, the word *umm*, *ummah*, and *imam* are related each other.⁸

Lane also said that *ummiy-ummam* refers to word *ummah*, which are the Arabs. In further, he compared it to anyone – whether Arab or not- that don't know or don't have any knowledge about reading and writing.⁹ In the first meaning, word *ummiyyun* refers to Arabs that are famous as illiterate society. Whereas the second meaning indicates that, the word was not derived from Jews. This is as explained in their holy books, Taurat and Talmud.¹⁰ Both holy books described the idea of Jew's superiority than others and asserted that they are the chosen group.¹¹

In addition to those ideas, Muhammad al-Baqir¹², Ja'far al-Sadiq¹³, and al-Nuhhas¹⁴ explained the concept of relation

⁷ Al-Murtada al-Zabidi, *Taj al-Arus*, VIII, P. 185

⁸ M. Nur Kholis Setiawan dan Djaka Soetapa, *Meniti Kalam Kerukunan; Beberapa Istilah Kunci dalam Islam dan Kristen*, (Jakarta: PT BPK Gunung Mulia, 2010), P. 196

⁹ Lane, E.W., *An-Arabic English Lexicon*, I, P. 92

¹⁰ Talmud is a opus of Jews that includes teachings of behavior. In this book, the explanation is discusses about laws, ethics or behavior, tradition, and history of Jew. For further explanation, read; *Jejak Yakjuj dan Makjuj dalam Inskripsi Yahudi*, written by Muhammad Alexander Wisnu Sasongko, (Jakarta: Penerbit Hikmah, 2009), P. 17

¹¹ Syekh Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Menikmati Jamuan Allah. Inti Pesan dari Tema ke Tema*. Translated from *Nahw Tafsir Mawdhu'i li Suwar Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*, (Jakarta: PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2007), P. 68-69

¹² Al-Alusi, *Ruh Al-Ma'ani*, IX, P. 79

¹³ Al-Tabarsi, *Majma' Al-Bayan*, IV, P. 487

between *ummiy* and *umm al-qura*. In this context, *umm al-Qura* refers to the holy city of Mecca. This is as written in QS. Asy-Syura (42: 7).

وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا لِتُنذِرَ أُمَّ الْقُرَى وَمَنْ حَوْلَهَا وَتُنذِرَ يَوْمَ الْجُمُعِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ فَرِيقٌ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَفَرِيقٌ فِي السَّعِيرِ

Thus have we sent by inspiration to Thee an Arabic Qur'an: that Thou Mayest warn the mother of cities and all around her,- and warn (them) of the Day of Assembly, of which there is no doubt: (when) some will be In the garden, and some In the Blazing Fire.

Thus, it can be inferred that those ideas can be summarized in four explanations, they are:

- a. *Al-Ummiy* is illiterate man; a man that cannot read and write.
- b. *Al-Ummiy* related to word *al-Ummah* is the condition of mankind before they know how to read and write, especially the Arabs. Because, they were in the condition at that era as described above.
- c. *Al-Ummiy* was derived from word *al-umm*, the condition of inability to read and write as when he was born.
- d. *Al-Ummiy* refers to *umm al-Qura* that is the holy city of Mecca.

2. Terminological Meaning

As explained in al-Qur'an, the clearest explanation of word *ummiy* is that Muhammad cannot read and write. It is

¹⁴ Al-Qurtubi, *Ahkam Al-Qur'an*, IV, P. 2735

written in al-Qur'an six times. It was mentioned twice in singular term as *ummiy* and four times in plural term such as *ummiyyun* and *ummiyyin*.¹⁵ As many expressions in al-Qur'an that adopted some terms from *ahl al-Kitab*, so did the term *ummiy* and *ummiyyun*. It is possible that both terms are taken from *ahl al-Kitab* and technical terms in their holy book.

Term *ummiy* and *umam* are technical terms that often mentioned in Taurat for Jews. The ancient Hebrew used those terms to address individual, group, or non-Israeli people. term *ummiyyun* is also attributed to any group that don't have any holy book.¹⁶ This fact is as written in some verses below: "Thus the God said: don't follow any path of "umami", and toward verses from the God, don't ever stay away as they did before.¹⁷

The descendant of Israeli have ever rebelled *Rabb*, their God that have expelled them from Egypt and from the reach of Egypt's emperor, Pharaoh. Thereupon, they believed in other gods and did the obligations of 'umam' or others.¹⁸ Historically, the early Christians also have ever adopted those terms (*ummiy* and *umam*) from the Jews to address "faithless people", as described in this verse:

¹⁵ 'Abd Albaqi, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, P. 81

¹⁶ Syekh Al-Maqdisi, *Nabi Muhammad Buta Huruf atau Genius? Mengungkap Misteri "Keummian" Rasulullah*, (Jakarta: Nun Publisher, 2007), P. 20

¹⁷ Aramia 10:2

¹⁸See Raja-Raja II: 17; 7-8. See also Nahmea 9:5; Ashea 42:6;Ashea 2:2, dan Mazmur 135:15

*Go and teach those 'umam', baptize them on behalf of Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost. Teach them how to hold on to all of my will to them. This is I that will accompany you all till the end. Amen!*¹⁹

In Muhammad PBUH era, there were many scribes (*ahl al-Kitab*) both Jews and Christians that lived surroundings. Since then, it is not surprising to find that al-Qur'an includes some of their terms. Both *ummiy* and *umami* refer to 'people that do not believe in any holy book or Arab polytheists'.²⁰ In short, the term *ummiy* can be understood as 'people that cannot read the earlier holy book, whereas they did not receive any taught of the coming prophet'.²¹

It has been quoted fully as written in "King James Version" or "Authorised Version" that: "*And the holy book was given to a man that didn't know how to read. The angle said: 'Read this, I pray for you'. He answered: 'I really don't know how to read'.*"²² It can be noticed that no Arabic Bible found in 6th century when the prophet Muhammad PBUH lived and spread Islamic teachings. In addition, he was totally an illiterate man that cannot read or write and no one have ever taught him even one word, as described in the holy Qur'an, An-Najm (53: 3-4)

وَمَا يَنْطَلِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۖ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

¹⁹ Matius 28:19-20

²⁰ *Ibid.*, P. 22

²¹ *Ibid.*, P. 29

²² Kitab Yesaya :29:12

Nor does He say (aught) of (his own) desire. It is no less than inspiration sent down to him.

Implicitly, without teaching of anyone Muhammad PBUH was able to make other well-educated people that can read and write well feel shy and embarrassed of their wisdom.²³ The word *ummiy* is not related only to the Jews, but also others that have holy books such as Christians. As *the ummiy prophet*, Muhammad PBUH has double roles; himself as an Arab and as the Prophet and Messenger of God that has been delegated for *ummiy* people and other nations.²⁴

According to Muhammad Ali, an interpreter of al-Qur'an, term *the ummiy prophet* has three important meanings. *First*, he was an illiterate man that cannot read even write. *Second*, he was coming from Arab nation. *Third*, he was coming from Mecca. The term *ummiy* that is rooted from word *umm* also means *mother*. Therefore, term *ummiy* also means a man that does not have any teacher, as a newborn baby. There are some evidences in al-Qur'an that Muhammad PBUH really cannot read and write before he was appointed as the prophet by the God.²⁵ Since then, it was impossible that Muhammad PBUH was taught by any creature about al-Qur'an. However, that fact

²³ Ahmed Deedat, *Apa Kata Injil Tentang Muhammad*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Panjimas, 1992), P. 25

²⁴ A.Th. Van Leeuwen, *Agama Kristen dalam Sejarah Dunia*, (Jakarta: Gunung Mulia, 1997), P. 65

²⁵ Abdul Haq Vidyarthi dan Abdul Ahad Dawud, *Ramalan Tentang Muhammad, Dalam Kitab Suci Agama Zoroaster, Hindu, Buddha, dan Kristen*, (Jakarta Selatan: PT. Mizan Publika, 2009), P. 156

was denied by Jews by their doubts. This is as explained in God's revelation QS. al-Furqon (25: 4)

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ افْتَرَاهُ وَأَعَانَهُ عَلَيْهِ قَوْمٌ آخَرُونَ فَقَدْ جَاءُوا ظُلْمًا وَزُورًا

But the misbelievers say: "Naught is this but a lie which He has forged, and others have helped Him at it." In truth it is they who have put forward an iniquity and a Falsehood.

The verse above is the enough evidence to oppose the opinion that Muhammad never followed the command of Jews, Christians, or others in arranging al-Qur'an. In the other word, this fact showed and proved special features of Muhammad PBUH as "the *ummiy* prophet" and opinion that he is the Buddha Maitreya²⁶ because he was never taught by anyone.²⁷

B. *Ummiy* in Prophetic Traditions

In a prophetic tradition that has been narrated by Imam Muslim and Nasa'i said that Muhammad PBUH said:

أنا أمة أمية لانكتب ولا نحسب، الشهر هكذا وهكذا وهكذا

²⁶ According to the writer, who called, as Buddha Maitreya is the savior, the last prophet, *khatamin nabiyyin*. For further information, read *Ramalan Tentang Muhammad, Dalam Kitab Suci Agama Zoroaster, Hindu, Buddha, dan Kristen*. By; Abdul Haq Vidyarthi and Abdul Ahad Dawud, pg. 96. Or read wikipedia /keyword Maitreya.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, P. 157

We are the *ummiy* nations that don't know how to read and to count. Month is like this, this, and this". (He used his fingers to indicate the number twenty-nine or thirty days).²⁸

As narrated, the reading and writing ability of Arabs, especially in the early of Islam era, was low. People that can read and write at that time did not reach the number of twenty people. The scarcity of reading and writing's instruments and disability of those skills brought them to rely on memorizing and learning by heart. Furthermore, memorizing ability is used to measure the cleverness and scientific intelligence. Thus, it is not surprising when a poet Zurummah asked a man who saw him writing not to tell others about what he did. At the time,²⁹ he said to him,

أئمة عندنا عيب

Writing ability is a kind of shame for us.

إنّا أمة أميّة لانكتب ولا نحسب. رواه البخاري ومسلم وغيرها³⁰

We are really an *ummiy* nation. We cannot write, read and count as well.

This narration showed that Muhammad PBUH and most of Arabs at the era are *ummiy*. They cannot write and count any calculation and the circulation of stars. In the other word, they

²⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Mukjizat Al-Qur'an, Ditinjau dari aspek kebahasaan, Isyarat Ilmiah, dan Pemberitaan Gaib*, (Bandung: Mizan Pustaka, 2007), P. 74

²⁹ *Ibid.*, P. 75

³⁰ Narrated by Al-Imam Al-Bukhari in Kitab Shaum, Chapter Qaulun Nabi, "La Naktubu"... Narrated by Ibnu Umar. In complete edition, the narration of the prophetic tradition is "A month is like this (signing with his fingers), 29 days once, 30 days once."

cannot write any letter and count as astronomers do. The conclusion is that their condition is like when they were born, which they did not learn yet to write and count. At that time, they were on their original situation. In other explanations, *al-ummiyyah* means neglectful (*al-Ghaflah*) and fool (*al-Jahalah*). Term *ummiy* seems coming from that meaning. Therefore, it also means less-intelligence.³¹

Some of Muhammad's companions said that he was an *ummiy* that cannot read and write. They were Abdullah ibn Abbas and Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. Ibnu Abbas said, "*The Prophet Muhammad PBUH cannot read and write at all. He was ummiy*". As narrated by Ibn Mas'ud, he said so, "*he (the prophet) cannot read and write*".

From the explanation above, it is clear that Muhammad PBUH is a man that cannot read and write even a letter.³² He once said, "I am Muhammad, an *ummiy* prophet (said three times). No prophet after me. I was given a specialty that my speech is short but compendious". Umar asked to him, "Oh, my prophet, why did you become the most fluent among us? Whereas you were always around us?" he answered, "in the past, language of Ismail fellows was nearly extinct. Then, Gabriel came to me and I saved and

³¹ Look *Mufradat Al-Fadzil Al-Qur'an* written by Raghib Al-Ashfahani in entry *umm*

³² Kiai Haji Moenawar Chalil, *Kelengakapan Tarikh Muhammad*, (Jakarta: Gema Insani press, 2001), P. 155

protect it!” Muhammad’s PBUH fluency was admitted by his companions and his opponents as well.

In a prophetic tradition narrated by ad-Dailami, told that one of Muhammad’s companion once asked him, “we have never seen any fluent people but you, oh my prophet!” he answered, “that’s all because Allah have kept me away from any mistake and chosen me to convey his message and revelation, al-Qur’an”.³³

C. *Illiteration (ummiy) of Muhammad PBUH in view of Islamic Scholars and Interpretations of al-Qur’an*

Quraish Syihab has explained different opinions of some Islamic scholars about illiteration (*ummiy*) of Muhammad PBUH. *First* is that he could not read anything. However, there are also some contradictive premises informing that Muhammad PBUH finally can read and write after moving to Medina, and narrating that he could not read and write until he passed away. Most of scholar said that he was called as *ummiy* because the Arabs at the time do not know how to read and write. For him, this epithet was a miracle because he can convey the message from God completely without any change or alteration, even one word, whereas some Arab orators sometimes change their prepared texts by adding or reducing.³⁴

³³ Fuad Kauma, *50 Mukjizat Rasulullah*, (Jakarta: Gema Insani press, 2000), P. 145

³⁴ Moh. Quraish Shihab, *Mistik, Seks, dan Ibadah*. (Jakarta: Penerbit Republika, 2004), P. 160

Imam Syafi'i said that Allah delegated his prophet Muhammad PBUH in Mecca, his hometown and the house of *ummiy* nation, including some Arabs that inhabited in surroundings. No any community from them that is coming from non-Arabs (*'ajam*) but slaves or unknown people. Al-Azhari said that the meaning of illiterate man as explained by Syafi'i is a man that his reading is not good enough. In Arabic conversation, term *ummiy* means a man that cannot read and write and most of Arabs are *ummiy*.

Illiteration of Muhammad PBUH means that he cannot read and write well. Therefore, he could narrate stories of last people inspired by the God to his companions and other Arabs. Then he repeated the wording many times from one group to others. People usually did not do repetition in the same wording to tell some stories as Muhammad did, but they always add or reduce it or use different sentences.³⁵ Word *ummiy* in Qur'anic verses has two meanings. *First*, it is a man that cannot read and write. *Second*, it is a man that has no holy book as Taurat and Bible. The second meaning seems appropriate with those verses, but the first meaning is the best according al-Qur'an and prophetic tradition.³⁶

A famous scholar said that Muhammad PBUH could read and write at the last of his life. For them, the evidence is that Muhammad PBUH erased his name in Hudaibiyah agreement when

³⁵ Tafsir Imam Syafi'i jilid 3. *Al-Umm* jilid IV P. 172. Look also in *Al-Umm*, corrected by Abdul Muthalib, jilid V P. 399, 400

³⁶ Yusuf Qardhawi, *Fatwa-Fatwa Kontemporer* Jilid 3, *Penerjemah Abdul Hayyie Al-Kattani, dkk.* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, Press, 2002). P. 157-161

Ali R.A refused it. His action indicated that he knew his written name (Prophet Muhammad PBUH) and then erased it. The scholar is Abul Walid al-Baji, a scholar of Maliki school of thought and who explained book al-Muwattha' of Imam Malik. When he explained his opinion, he was accused as heretic (*zindik*) and reprehended in front of the public. Then, he defended himself in some scientific debate and correspondences with some other scholars from all over the world. The evidence mostly used by al-Baji and his follower is a prophetic tradition narrated by Bukhari and Muslim about Hudaibiyah agreement. There, written that “then, Muhammad PBUH took the sheet even though he was unable to write. Later, he wrote ‘this matter was applied by Muhammad ibn Abdullah’.”³⁷

That tradition explained clearly that Muhammad PBUH could not write well, whereas the written text was: Ali writes, “This matter was applied by Muhammad ibn Abdullah” as replacemen of what: “Muhammad the Prophet”. This case only indicated that he just understand some words, such as “Muhammad ibn Abdullah”, but his knowledge about writing is so limited that cannot change him from *ummiy* to a man who knows how to write.

This opinion was relied on an argumentation of a prophetic tradition linked to the prophet Muhammad PBUH by Ibn Majah, “When I was in a journey of *Isra' Mi'raj*, I found it was written in heaven that; Almsgiving will be rewarded as tenfold, and giving

³⁷ Tafsir Al-Alusi, *Ruuh al Ma'ani*, juz 21, P. 544

loan will be rewarded as eighteen fold.” Reading ability was the evidence that someone is also able to write. That prophetic tradition is the only narrated by Ibnu Majah and no one did but him. In Zawaid, Al-Bushuri said that one of narrator in the prophetic tradition was weak (*dlaif*).³⁸ Syekh al-Bani wrote in *Dha’if al-Jami’ as-Shaghir* that the man was really weak (*dla’if jiddan*) and his narration cannot be used.

According to Prof. Sya’rawi, if only Muhammad PBUH was delegated in a high-civilization state, there must be possibility that his teachings can be assume as the result of human’s idea, not inspired by Allah SWT to his prophet as his revelation. In the other word, if illiteration for some people is a kind of deficiency, it is not so for Muhammad PBUH since he was taught directly by Allah SWT. Therefore, Sya’rawi agrees to admit Prophet’s companion as genius. Yet, Muhammad PBUH did not learn by himself but directly guided by Allah SWT.³⁹

Explanation of term *ummiy* according to Sufis is illiterate man. All people that have read tasawuf poems and other poems in any language can understand the importance of concept of illiteration (*ummiy*) of Muhammad PBUH. As explained by Farid ad-Din al-Attar, he was an illiterate man but his knowledge exceeded a hundred thousand books. Maulana Rumi explained his condition and called us to understand the nobleness of term *ummiy*.

³⁸ Ibnu Majah in *As-Shadaqaat* (2431)

³⁹ M. Rojaya, *al-Qur’an itu Mudah*, (Bandung: Dar! Mizan, 2005), P.

He wrote in his prose, *Fihi ma fih*, that Muhammad PBUH was called as illiterate man (*ummiy*) not because he could not read and write. It is not it. A man that wrote signs on the surface of moon—a reference that don't refers to al-Qur'an⁴⁰ about *syaqq al-qamar*—cannot be admitted as an illiterate man. On the contrary, it means that he does not need partial reason because he is always connected to the source of all intellectual activities, *al-aql al-awwal*, the God. From this definition, we can see that *ummiy* is not an uncomplimentary term to indicate an unintellectual man, but it refers to a man that has strong relation to the owner of source of inspiration, the owner of *ilm laduni*, inner intellectual that is inspired by the God.⁴¹

Thus, some scholars have different opinions about illiteration of Muhammad PBUH after he was appointed as a prophet. *First*, most of them said that Muhammad PBUH was an *ummiy*, which could not read and write as when he was not a prophet yet. *Second*, some of them said that he could read and write after he was appointed as the prophet.⁴² Some of them are Abu Dhar Abd bin Ahmad bin al-Harawi, Abu Fath al-Naysaburi, Abu al-Walid al-Baji⁴³, Al-Sya'bi⁴⁴, African scholars and others⁴⁵. In addition, al-

⁴⁰ See QS. 54;1

⁴¹ Farhad Daftary, *Tradisi-Tradisi Intelektual Islam*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga, 2002), P. 204-205

⁴² Wan Zailan Kamaruddin Wan Ali, *Siapa itu Nabi-Nabi*, (Kuala Lumpur: PTS Millennia, 2007), P. 208

⁴³ Al-Alusi, *Ruh Al-Ma'ani*, XXI, P. 5

⁴⁴ Al-Qurtubi, *Ahkam Qur'an*, VII, 5068

⁴⁵ Ibnu Hajar Al-Atsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, VII, P. 353

Murtadha Alam al-Huda⁴⁶, Al-Hurr al-Amili⁴⁷, and Al-Majlisi⁴⁸, are Shi'a scholars that stand in the same opinion as written in QS. Al-Ankabut: 48.

وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَتْلُوا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخُطُّهُ بِيَمِينِكُمْ إِذَا لَارْتَابَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ

And you were not (able) to recite a Book before This (al-Qur'an), nor are you (able) to transcribe it with your right hand: In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted.

D. *Ummiy* in Orientalists' View

Influenced by Jews and Christians, most of orientalist said that it is impossible that Muhammad PBUH was an illiterate man. According to them, he must be able to read. One of them was Abraham Geiger who said that there must be strong relation between term *ummiy* and 'am-ha-ares'.⁴⁹ Noldeke and Schawally said that some verses related to *ummiy* are in Madina period (*madaniy verse*). According to Noldeke, the concept of *ummiy* in al-Qur'an is contradictive to scribes' concept. It means that *ummiy* refers to a society without revelation. Schawally regarded *ummiy* as derivation from *ummah* (nation, society) and this meaning is parallel with ancient Greece (*laikhos*) from (*laos*) that means society. It is also parallel with language of Syriak-Aramaik

⁴⁶ Al-Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan*, VIII, P. 287

⁴⁷ Al-Hurr, al-Amili, *al-Fausul al-Muhimmah*, P. 155

⁴⁸ Al-Majlisi, *Bihar al-Anwar*, XVI, P. 136

⁴⁹ Norman Calder, "The Ummi in Early Islamic Juristic Literature," DI 67 (1990), P. 113

'*almaya (saecularis)*. Schawally did not explain more about the meaning of *ummiy* as Hebrew language, *am-ha-ares*.⁵⁰

According to Hirshfield, Muhammad PBUH was able to read and write. In his view, Muhammad PBUH know Hebrew letter when he visited to Syria. In addition, the fact shows that Muhammad PBUH was able to write when he was in Medina. For him, it is impossible that Muhammad PBUH was not able to read and write when he was more than fifty years old. He also said that many names and words written in al-Qur'an showed that Muhammad PBUH was misreading in his own notes made with unskillful hand.⁵¹

If Noldeke Schawally and Hirsfeld argue that Prophet Muhammad is not *ummiy*. In other word he has ability in writing and reading. It is purposed to deny the authenticity of Qur'an which is not from Allah, but the product of Muhammad. Thereby, the orientalist's opinion is rejected. Because this illiteracy is to prove that muhammad really did not know about the preceding books, Taurat and Injil. Also, Muhammad never had teacher, because the learning method of him is directly from Allah, not people.

In other side, there is another orientalist who stated that Muhammad is truly an illiterate. He is Conte Henry de Castri, an orientalist that lived in 1853-1915 said that Muhammad PUBH was not able to read and write, as he said. He was an illiterate prophet (*ummiy*), a title that no one can deny its truth. It is difficult for

⁵⁰ Theodor Noldeke dan Friedrich Schwally, *Geschichte*. 1:14.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, P.149-150

eastern to learn without anyone knows because the character of their lives is open, whereas literature and writing at that time was nearly unknown and never appeared in their hearts.

From those explanations, it is clear that Muhammad PBUH did not ever read the Holy book; his religion did not ever adopt from earlier religions, as accused by stupid people in Muhammad's history, a history that was full of pries and noble for him that is unknown for whom never know him.⁵² Since Muhammad PBUH and Arabs is illiterate people (*ummiy*), the group of *takfir* said that illiteration (*ummiyyah*) is a character of Muslims. For them, the meaning of *ummiyyah* here is leaving all traditions and knowledge as popularly understood these days. That group does not know language style of al-Qur'an. They believed in anything said by their leader who said that Allah has given him specialty to interpret Qur'anic verses even it words. One of their interpretations is about *ummiyah* of Muslims as explained above.

Al-Qur'an used term *ummiyun* to distinguish between them from scribes. In Qur'anic term, scribes are people whom the God sent his revelation to without prophet delegated to guide them and they exactly understand this condition. Sometimes Allah called them as *ummiy* but sometimes as foolish people. Term *ummiyun* in this context as well the condition that they do not understand the revelation were not indication of foolishness or silliness. People that have been received some holy books are Jews and Christians,

⁵² Asy-Syeikh Khalil Yasien, *Muhammad di Mata Cendikiawan Barat*, (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1989), P. 137

whereas ‘people that don’t understand’ in that verse are Arabs. This condition of Arabs is because Allah did not sent his holy book to them until he delegated Muhammad PBUH as the prophet. Before it, they were *ummiy* people that did not know teachings of *samawi* religions sent down before.⁵³

In short, *ummiyah* according to Arabs, al-Qur’an and Muhammad PBUH is not foolishness, because in the history of humankind, reading and writing are found lately. Thus, before it, means to transfer and to gain knowledge are out of reading and writing, because tools to transfer or gain knowledge is not only by both tools but also by listening or speaking. Since then, Dr. Nazami Luka in his book, *Muhammad; ar-Rasul war-risalah*, said that obtaining knowledge is not only by writing and reading. Even though Arabs at that time were *ummiy*, Muhammad PBUH used some typists and motivated his companions to learn writing.⁵⁴

In the book *Jawami’us Siirah*, Ibnu Hazm wrote that some of Muhammad’s typists are Mughirah bin Syu’bah and Husein bin Namir. Both of them are assigned to write and document finance matters⁵⁵ Ibnu Abdil Barr explained in his book, *al-Isti’aab* that Muhammad PBUH commanded Abdullah bin Sa’id ibnul Ash to teach people in Medina reading and writing. Abdullah bin Sa’id ibnul Ash was able to write and read well.⁵⁶

⁵³ K. Salim Bahnasawi, *Butir-Butir Pemikiran Sayyid Qutb, Menuju Pembaruan Gerakan Islam*, (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 2003), P. 137

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, P. 138

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, P. 139

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, P. 143

E. The History of Reading and Writing

As narrated in some history books, Muhammad's companion in Mecca were neglectful about reading and writing. When they moved to Medina, Muhammad PBUH ordered them to learn reading and writing until there established an Islamic school "*Dar Makhrajah bin Naufal*". Later, Muhammad PBUH decided the importance of it and explained it to his companions, women, and polytheists as well.⁵⁷

In some noble months, as predicted by Arabs, Muhammad PBUH usually went out with his family (Bani Hasyim) to visit traditional markets located near to Mecca. In those markets in pilgrimage season, come people from anywhere; some of the most popular markets are Ukazh, Majannah, and Zulmajah. Those markets were not only full of commercial matters, but also some poets, linguists, and orators coming from several tribes to show their speech and join in a contest, then examine their ability in writing and making poems.⁵⁸ In addition, Muhammad PBUH also ever called emperors in Arab Peninsula and regions around it to believe in Islam by sending some letters to those emperors. In every letters he sent, there was his signature 'Muhammad the Prophet'.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ M. Said Ramadhan Al- Buthi, *Salafī, Sebuah Fase sejarah, bukan mazhab*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Gema Insani Press, 2005), P. 12

⁵⁸ H. Rus'an, *Lintasan Sejarah Islam Di zaman Rasulullah SAW*, (Semarang: Penerbit Wicaksana, 1999) P. 27

⁵⁹ It's exciting that in every letters sent by Muhammad PBUH to those emperors were always signature or sign of silver ring engraved with three

This story was narrated by Anas and corrected by Bukhari in his book ‘*al-Jami’ as-Shahih lil Bukhari*’.⁶⁰

Some emperors whom Muhammad PBUH sent his letter is Heraclius, King of Rome, which the letters brought by Dahyah bin Chalifah al-Kalbi⁶¹. The letters of Kisra, King of Persia were brought by ‘Abdullah bin Hafazah Assahmi, while the letter for Najasyi, king of Habsyi was brought by ‘Amr bin Umaiyah Addlamri. The letter for Muqauqis of Egypt governor was brought by Hathib bin Abi Balta’ah. The letter for Amir Oman was brought by ‘Amr bin ‘Aash Assahmi. The letter for Amir Yamamah was

words, “Muhammad the Prophet”. This is because at the time, all letters would not be read by recipient without any official sign or stamped. As narrated, Muhammad’s ring used to official stamp seal after he passed away was continually used by Abu Bakar r.a, Umar bin Khatab r.a, Utsman bin Affan r.a, to sign the official letters. When Utsman r.a were about to pass away, the ring was lost because of falling in a spring called Aris. It cannot be found even though many people had sought it for three days. Prophetic tradition narrating about the condition of Muhammad’s ring made from silver and engraved with three words, “Muhammad the Prophet” was corrected by Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidzi, Nasa’i, Ibnu Majah, ad-Darimi, dan Ahmad, and all are narrated by Anas r.a. Look, *Kelengkapan Tarikh Nabi Muhammad Saw*, Jilid 2, KH. Moenawar Chalil, Jakarta, Gema Insani Press, 2001, P. 393

⁶⁰ Shahih al-Bukhari, al-Libas, 52, 55: Ibnu Sa’ad, ath-Thabaqat, 1/2: 164; see al-Watsaiqus Siyasiyah

⁶¹ Here, enclosed the content of letter sent by Muhammad PBUH to King Heraclus. بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ، مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى هِرَقْلَ عَظِيمِ الرُّومِ: سَلَامٌ عَلَى مَنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهُدَى، أَمَا بَعْدُ، فَإِنِّي أَدْعُوكَ بِدَعَايَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ، أَسْلِمُكَ تَسْلِمًا، يُؤْتِيكَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَكَ مَرَّتَيْنِ، فَإِن تَوَلَّيْتَ فَإِنَّ عَلَيْكَ إِثْمَ الْأَيْسِيِّينَ ” وَ {رَبَّنَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَعُوْلُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ

Look Imam Bukhari, *Terjemah Hadits Shahih Bukhari*, (Kuala Lumpur: Kilang Book Centre, 2009), P. 11. Atau baca sumber aslinya di dalam kitab Shahih al-Bukhari, Juz I P. 8 no. 7

brought by Salith bin 'Amr. The letter for Amir Bahraen was brought by 'Ala al-Hadlrami. The letter for Harits al-Ghasani Amir Ghassan, the leader of an area in the border of Syam land (Syria) was brought by Syuja' bin Wahb al-Asadi.⁶²

The etymological meaning of term *ummiy* and explanation from al-Qur'an is illiteration; 'a condition when a man cannot read and write'. However, the fact shows that in Arabs society found many literatures written clearly, such as *al-Kitabat al-'Ammah* that was usually used by Arabs to write some narrations of life, notes of their practical and scientific activities such as document of agreement, notes of commercial activities, incision in signet, letters, and pamphlets.

In Arabs society, both in Jahiliyah era and the early of Islam, there were certain people that learnt writing and successfully taught them how to write. Some of them were Umar Ibn Zawahar, Ghailan Ibn Salmah, Ibn Mu'tab, Yusuf Ibn Hakam al-Tsaqafy, al-Hallaj Ibn Yusuf al-Tsaqafy⁶³ dan Ubadah Ibn Shamit.⁶⁴ Moreover, besides having ability to write Arabic letters, they were also masters in some other languages. For instance, Adi Ibn Zaid al-'Ibady ever learnt Arabic and Persian language, so that he was popular as the most fluent people and the master of reading Arabic

⁶² M. Nur Kholis Setiawan dan Djaka Soetapa, *Meniti Kalam Kerukunan; Beberapa Istilah Kunci dalam Islam dan Kristen*, (Jakarta: PT BPK Gunung Mulia, 2010), P. 241

⁶³ Abu Abdullah al-Zanjani, *Tarikh al-Qur'an*, P. 42

⁶⁴ Al-Qurthuby, *Al-Tidzkar*, P. 105

and Persian language.⁶⁵ Waraqah bin Naufal was also capable in writing in Hebrew.⁶⁶ As the suggestion from the Prophet, Zaid binTsabit also learnt to write in Suryaniyah for 19 days,⁶⁷ besides, he was also famous as the Prophet's translator that was ordered to translate a kind of Persian news, Qibthy and Habsyi.⁶⁸

Some of the Prophet's typists were Khulafa'ur Rasyidin, Thalhaf bin Ubaidillah, Zubair bin Awwam, Amir bin Fuhairah, Abdullah bin Arqam, Ubay bin Ka'ab, Tsabit bin Qais bin Syammas, Khalid bin Said, Handhalah bin Ar-Rabi', Zaid bin Tsabit, Muawiyah, Surahbil bin Hasanah, Al-Ala' bin Hadhrami, Khalid bin Al-Walid, Al-Mughirah bin Syu'bah, Abdulah bin Rawahah, Hudzaifah bin Al-Yaman. The most basic and special one of others is Muawiyah dan Zaid bin Tsabit.⁶⁹

There were also some women in early Islamic development who were also able to read and write. They were Hafsa binti Umar, wife of the Prophet, Ummi Kaltsum binti Uqbah, A'isyah binti Sa'ad, Karimah binti al-Miqdad. Some of them who were only able to read were Aisyah binti Abu Bakr dan Ummu Salamah.⁷⁰ Whereas Khafsa, wife of the Prophet had important notes about the Prophet's life when none of others had it. Those notes were

⁶⁵ Abu al-Farj al-Ishfahany, *Al-Aghany*, II, P. 101

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, III, P. 120

⁶⁷ Ibn Abi Dawud, *Al-Mashahif*, P. 3

⁶⁸ Al-Mas'udy, *Al-Tanbih Wa al-Isyraf*, P. 283

⁶⁹ Syaikh Sayyid Muhammad Al-Maliki, *Sejarah Penting Peristiwa Hidup Nabi Saw Dari A Sampai Z*. (Yogyakarta: Citra Risalah, 2008), P. 54

⁷⁰ Wan Zailan Kamaruddin Wan Ali, *Siapa itu Nabi-Nabi*, (Kuala Lumpur: PTS Millennia, 2007), P. 457

later borrowed by Abu Bakar to copy in one *mushaf*. She was one of the Prophet's wives who can read and write well. She learnt writing from Syafa' Ummu Sulaiman as ordered by the Prophet.⁷¹

Those facts indicate that the culture of reading and writing in Arabs society had appeared and spread in a large scale yet it did not reach to a scale that can erase their popularity as *ummiy* society. Characteristics and predicate of *ummiy* is so dominant among them that Islam struggle to completely remove that predicate from their culture.⁷² Interpretation of *ummiy* as being not able to read and write is significant for Muslims. This interpretation symbolized as important as birth mark of a virgin in Christians tradition, which emphasized more in purity of man or woman that convey the God's message to humankind. The revelation can be qualified by solely input from human.⁷³

⁷¹ Nizar Abazhah, *Bilik-bilik Cinta Muhammad, Kisah Sehari-hari Rumah Tangga Nabi*, (Jakarta: Penerbit Zaman, 2009), P. 353

⁷² Al-Farmawy, *Rasm al-Mushhaf*, P. 27

⁷³ Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad Sang Nabi, Sebuah Biografi Kritis*, (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2011), P. 106