

**Sufic Vision of Shah Muhammad Ghaus & Shah Wali
Ullah in the Light of Quranic Studies**
Umi-Salma *

Abstract

Mysticism / Sufism, it may be underscored, is an integral part of all religions. As a rule, mystical way of life, helps us to purge off all animal passions and makes our heart vibrant with the remembrance of God. Sufi / mystic, in brief, can be characterized as a God-intoxicated man as his thoughts and deeds are meant exclusively to seek the pleasure / blessings of God Almighty. It may be emphasized that in Islam a genuine Sufi / mystic cannot proclaim to have received a new form of knowledge (as it would run counter to our fundamental faith in the finality of the prophecy and prophet-hood); however, he can legitimately proclaim to have attained a new level of understanding whereby he can appreciate the inner secrets and verities of religion. This delicate point, we wish to observe, should not be lost sight of in our readings of the works of great mystics of Islam or for that reason great mystics of any other religion. This article is meant to highlight the same point.

Keywords: Shah Muhammad Ghaus, Shah Wali Ullah, Sufism, Tasawwuf, Quranic Studies

In Islamic perspective the creator and the Lord of the universe in his supreme mercy and beneficent sent to the people of the world from time to time messengers, apostles to recite revelation to purify and to teach them scriptures and wisdom. This process was completed and ended once and for all with Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H). He then assigned the task of refreshing and renewing the commands and prohibitions of God and guiding to qualify the righteousness and love of God to the Sufi saints. Sufism is called the reality of religion, the reality of Islam, for its focus on the inner experience of the Lord, on coming to know the Divine beloved. A true understanding of Sufi thoughts only comes from personal experience, without that experience it remains incomprehensible

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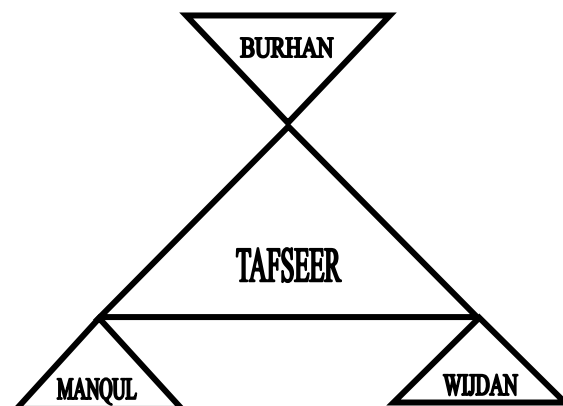
and intellectual illumination of Divine, which Sufis consider a gift of Grace and Mercy from God.

This article attempts to present the Sufi vision of Shah Muhammad Ghous (d.1759 A.D-1173 A.H) and Shah Wali Ullah (d.1762 A.D- 1176 A.H) in the light of Quranic Studies exoteric and esoteric both viewpoints. It thus represents different, yet complementary aspect of the Islamic Sufi understanding of the Holy Quran, which is multi dimensional; it is therefore luminous and can never be adequately explained in words. Here I will refer to the writings of above two renowned Sufis of the subcontinent Shah Wali Ullah (1762 A.D 1176A.H.) and Shah Muhammad Ghous (1759 A.D 1173A.H) whose explanations of the mystical literature is focal point of this paper. They synthesize the monistic framework of mystic theosophy with moral exigencies of *Shari`a* (Islamic Law). As *Abu-Hamid al Ghazali* (d.1111A.D-505A.H) an outstanding *Sufi* narrates that Quran works on two levels; the practical and cognitive. The former applies to the inner self and its purification without neglect of the outer activities, while the latter is a meaning found through inner experience in light of mystical thought, and it can be reached only through knowledge of the practical or outer aspects.¹

Shah Wali Ullah emphasized the belief that Islam was a dominant and divinely assisted religion. He believed it was divided into two vital aspects. Its exoteric side was concerned with the protection of the public good but its esoteric aspect involved the purification of the heart through virtuous deeds. Shah Muhammad Ghous in his books *Derkasb-o saluk-o biyan e haqiqth o marifath and Israr ut towhid*² reveal that his teachings are a fine specimen of orthodox moderation which is based on observing even the most `trivial` rules of Sharia in order to penetrate their inner meanings. An initiate or traveler on the path (*Salik*) never separates the outer observance of *Sharia* from its inner dimention, and therefore observes all of the requirements of both the exoteric and esoteric aspects. These mystical literatures are like so many streams, which flow forth from the gushing spring of inspiration deriving their impetus from the *Holy Quran*. *Shah Wali Ullah* with great confidence in the belief that God had gifted him with an understanding of the secrets of Quran, wrote a short treatise containing the principles of translating the Quran and one containing rules for the guidance of scholars in the understanding of Quranic exegesis in *al-Fouz-al-Kabir-fi-usul-al-Tafseer*.³ Both his medieval biographers and modern admirers regard Shah Wali Ullah's Persian translation of the Quran as revolutionary step. In an attempt to offer, further guidance to scholars of Quranic interpretation Shah Wali Ullah compiled another treatise to explain some

of the incomprehensible and controversial words and Phrases found in the Quran (*Mutashabihat*) this work mainly based on the traditions of *Abd-Allah ibn Abbas* on the methodology of *Al-Itaqa fi ulum al-Quran* by *Jalaludin Sayuti*.⁴

Shah Wali Ullah had his own point of view regarding the differences among the scholars of *fiqh* and Quranic exegesis and asserted that the differences could be eliminated if Muslims develop a full understanding and perception of his own interpretation that were based on *Burhan* (The Demonstrative Proof) *Wijdan* (Intuition) and *Manqul* (Traditional Knowledge).⁵



Burhan (Demonstrative Proof)

Shah Wali Ullah in his book *Hujjatullah-ul-Baligha* emphasized that the time was ripe to present the *Sharia* in the light of demonstrative proof but that the reasoning of the *maquliyani* (speculative rationalists) and that of Greek philosophers was to be totally rejected.⁶

Manqul (Traditional Knowledge)

Of all the gifts bestowed exclusively upon him Shah Wali Ullah assigned the highest place to his capacity to harmonize (*Tatbiq*) the traditional mystical and truly rational sciences of the Muslims, such as the Ashari *Kalam* in *Badaral-Bazigha*.⁷ This is in conformity with the ideas of Imam Ghazali who was the leader in Islam's supreme encounter with Greek philosophy that encounter from which Islamic theology emerged victorious and enriched, and in which Arabic Neo-Platonism received a blow, from which it did not recover.

Wijdan (Intuition)

In his book *Hamat Shah Wali Ullah* stated that Holy men who were known as *Awlia-Allah* (Friends of God) or *Sufis* upheld *Ihsan* (virtuous deeds). They could perform miracles, and through intuition, divine revelation and the illumination of their hearts they could diagnose the conditions of the hearts of the others. The esoteric aspect of the faith was identified by Shah Wali Ullah as *Ihsan* (virtuous deeds). The most comprehensive and precise meaning of perfect goodness is an action of the heart that involves thinking according to the standards of truth; than performing acts of worship in the consciousness that God sees them, identified the esoteric aspect of the faith. To attain perfect goodness, an initiate must establish his thoughts, feelings and concepts on a firm belief. His belief is further deepening by practicing the essentials of Islam and training his heart to receive Divine gifts and be illuminated by the light of His manifestations. Only one who has attained such a degree of perfect goodness can really do well to others just for the sake of God, without expecting anything in return. According to a prophetic saying, Perfect goodness is that you worship God as if you were seeing Him, He certainly sees you. When the prophet (peace be upon him) was asked about the enlarging (*sharah*) and its meaning in the verse, whenever God wills to guide a man, He enlarges his breast for Islam (Q.6.125).

He said (peace be upon him) it is a light, which God most high cast into heart. When he was asked what is the sign of it? He said withdrawal from the mansion of deception and return to the mansion of eternity. It was about this light that Muhammad said (peace be upon him) God created the creatures in darkness and then sprinkled upon them some of His light*. From that light must be sought an intuitive understanding of things. In another sayings of Prophet (Peace be upon Him) said, I am *NUR* (light) of God and the whole creation came from my *NUR* (Light). Shah Wali Ullah and Shah Muhammad Ghaus both have quoted these traditions in their writings.⁸

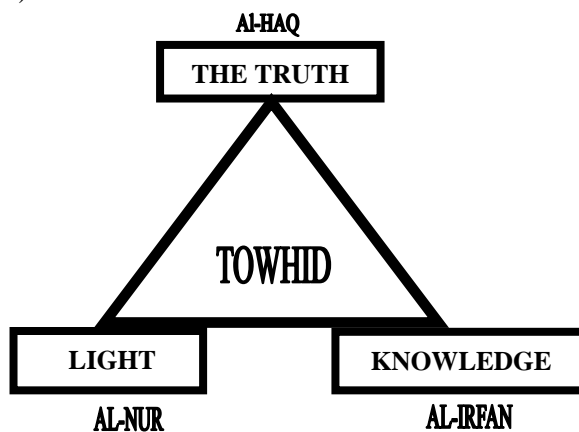
Shah Muhammad Ghaus (d.1759A.D/1173A.H) was not only a practical guide but also an excellent exponent of theoretical side of mysticism. His work on *Quran, Hadiths, Fiqh* and *Sufism* is summarized in Appendix-I. It is to be noted that Shah Muhammad Ghaus affected synthesis between the claims of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and the traditions (*Hadiths*). He also reckons the opposite doctrines of (*Sheikh-e-Akbar*) *Muhiuddin-Din Ibn-al-Arabi* (560-638 A.H) and *Mojadid Alaf-e-Sani, Sheikh Ahmad Sir Hindi* (1034 A.H). The difference in the two theories was merely a matter of semantics and that essentially they were the same. He discussed the mystic implications of Islamic "*Towhid*" and clearly expounded that both in its stages of Gnosticism (*Ilm*) as well as in

the stage of immediate vision (*Shuhud*) of the doctrine of the “unity of being”. The slave (*Abd*) remains the slave (*Abd*) and God remains God. His interpretation of passing way of the self (*fana*) extinction is that devotee in the state of consciousness, experiences a vision in which he feels one with God who manifests himself in the form of Light or illumination (*Tajalli*). The true vision of God is experienced only when the seeker contemplates God for his sake and in such a state; he becomes totally absorbed in Him. From one who contemplates God in his heart, is hidden all else. All things reduced to nothing, he obliterates from himself before God’s Majesty, and there remains nothing in his heart except God.⁹

Shah Muhammad Ghous in his book *Derkasb ũ salũk ũ biyan e haqiqat ũ marifat* on (pp 4,8) has stated;

- “*Salik* should strive hard in following the path adopted by Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) through his believes, actions, deeds, statements and interactions.
- *Salik* should study the books of *Hadith* literature and *Fiqh* .He should follow the traditions of *Fiqh*, which are in accordance with *Hadith* literature.
- The remembrance of God (*Dhikr*) should be with words and letters e.g. Allah or *Lā ilāh illāllah*.If remembrance (*Dhikr*) is without words it is called (*Fikr*) invocation”
- In Qadria Order the aspirant dominantly proceeds through keen desire for unification with God, (*shũq, dard*) yearning for God (*mohbat*) love of God (*sukr*) and (*dhkir*) remembrance of God where as in Naqshbandia Order aspirant passes through (*dhikr-e-jamiyat*) remembrance with concentration and (*muraqba*) soul contemplation towards God.”¹⁰

The Unitarian (*Towheed*) concept of God is *AL-HAQ*, light (*an-nur*) and knowledge (*Irfan*)



AL-HAQ

- Finally, those who strive to make known (the truth) will be saved. Allah is defined as Truth and is employed in varied terms. The truth is from the Lord, (2:147)
- Revelation is the truth, (3:60)
- The truth has been revealed to Muhammad (P.B.U.H) (10:108/32:03/39:41/47:02)
- He created the heavens and the earth in the truth, (15:85/16:03)
- The Quran is revealed with the truth, and with truth it has come down (02:176/02:213,252/03:03/17:105)
- God's damnation (02:160).

According to *Sharia* and the lexical definition, *Haq* alone is the word for Absolute Being. Considering derivation, the root of *Haq* (God) and *Haqeeqat* is the same. All the ideas or the essence of things have appeared from *Haq* and are manifested in *Haq*. Therefore, the Essence of God and His very existence is at work in the creation and origination of the world. This is the secret of 'He is the outward', which is explained by verse 'God is the manifest Truth' God alone, is manifest, or God alone is *Haq* who is manifest (24:25). The verse 'God is the light of the heavens and the earth' (27:35) further supports this statement. The essence (*Dhat*) of God, which is nothing but absolute Existence, by virtue of its manifestation is called 'Light' (*Nur*), which is visible by itself and which makes other things visible. This is an attribute of God (*Haq*) who exist by Himself and make other things visible. For the same reason, the term, 'the outward (*Al-Zahir*) has been applied to God-the absolute Being. As the essence of things, prior to creation subsists in the knowledge of God as ideas, so all things exist externally in this One Being and become visible by his attribute of light:

'God in His own Immutable state, Attribute and Being without undergoing any alteration in His Individuality, manifests Himself through His Attributes of Light in the forms of phenomenal objects, which in reality are but reflected entities, expressing, outwardly, in the essences which subsist in the knowledge of God, and, hence, it is that the divine Aspects (Being, Attributes etc) came to be associated with the world of creation or phenomena.'

'He is the first and the Last and the Outward and the Inward and He is the knower of all things' (57:03).¹¹

AL-NUR

Light (*an-nur*) like truth, it denotes a reality that is beyond man and his world and yet is in the heavens and earth and is granted to man when he strives for it. The revelation is the light given to man by God.

- “Believe, therefore in Allah, and His Messenger, and in the light which we have sent down. (64;8)”. The light which we have sent down; i.e. the light of revelation, the light of conscience, the light of reason and every kind of true light by which one may know Allah and His Will.
- Allah say: “O mankind Verily there hath come to you a convincing proof from your Lord; for we have sent unto you A Light (that is) manifest. (4; 174).”
- The proof and light are Quran and the Personality, Life and the teaching of Muhammad Al Mustafa (P.B.H).
- And those who believe In Allah and His Messengers, they are the sincere (Lovers of Truth), and the Witnesses (who testify), in the eyes of their Lord. They shell have their Reward and their Light (57; 19). Note that these two are especially high degrees in the spiritual kingdom, just short of Prophethood .For they have not only their reward in the spiritual kingdom of Allah but they themselves become sources of light and leading.

AL-IRFAN

- “He is the one who sends to his servant, Manifest Signs, that he may lead you from the depth of darkness into light.” (57:39)
- “God will raise up to suitable ranks (and degrees) those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) knowledge.”(57:21)

In *Sufi* terminology, spiritual heart is the center of all emotions and (intellectual and spiritual) faculties, such as perception, consciousness, the sense, reasoning and willpower. *Sufi* call it the human truth, philosophers call it the speaking selfhood, while an individual real nature is found in the heart respect to this intellectual and spiritual aspect of existence. One can be able to know, perceive, and understand. Spirit is the essence and inner dimension of this faculty; the biological spirit or the soul is its mount. It is one’s heart that

God addresses and it is this that undertakes responsibilities, suffers punishment or is rewarded, is elevated through true guidance or debased through deviation, and is honored or humiliated. The heart is also the “polished mirror” in which Divine Knowledge is reflected. The

heart both perceives and is perceived. The believer uses it to penetrate the soul, corporeal existence and mind, for it is like an eye of the spirit. Insight may be regarded as its faculty of sight, reason as its spirit and will as its inner dynamics.

Shah Mohammed Ghaus in his book *Dar Kasb-O-Saluk-O Biyan-i-Haqiqat-O-Marifat* (P- 47, 48, 49 and 68) has explained the journey by the aspirant in Fusls (chapters).

The above thoughts reveal that primary spiritual technique of Sufism is therefore prayer through which man returns to God, prayer in its most universal sense as it becomes ultimately unified with the rhythm of life itself. Prayer is essentially the remembrance of God. It is in fact extremely significant that in Arabic the word *dhikr* means both invocation and remembrance. *Dhikr* the recollection of God is the most significant means of reaching the state of perfect love, for the recitation of the various names of Allah leads to companionship with Him. The Prophet (S.A.W) said that Allah's love towards man is His grace and kindness. *Mahabbat* follows "*Ishq*" or passionate love of God. *Ishq* is the thought that soul of lover developed on attitude of *Shawq* or keen desire for an early union with God.

The lover's longing for early unification with God takes him to the stage of the illumination of his heart by the *fadl* or grace of God. When the heart is illuminated by Divine light, the aspirant experiences the stage of *Mushadat* or spiritual vision of God. This entirely depends on his love and faith in Him. During this journey, *salik* passes through four major stages, *Nasut*, *Malaqut*, *Jabarut* and *Lahut*. In *Alim-e-Nasut*, the *salik* lives according to the *Sharia*. He pursues the law of *Allah* as recommended by the Prophet and attains moral perfection. He enters into the spiritual path in the real sense at the second stage of *malaqut*. Here is the spiritual state of angelic nature is experienced. At the third stage of *Jabarut*, the aspirant acquired spiritual powers by the grace of Allah and attains knowledge of Allah (*Mari' fat*). At the last stage of *Lahut*, the *salik* attains Divine qualities. He is absorbed in the essence of *Allah* and finally realizes *Al-Haq* or truth.

The *salik*, as he proceeds on the upward journey and come close to him, is blessed with higher knowledge of Divinity. The highest degree in gnosis consists in knowing Allah in respect of his pure essence or the perfect unity, God's attributes subsisting in him and the Divine deeds. Knowledge of essence implies knowledge of unification (*al-tawhid*). Which means God is only one and there is nothing except him and he alone is the reality in every respect.¹²

Shah Muhammad Ghaus draws inspiration for his esoteric ideas from the *Quran* and *Sunnah* those who follow this path will get self –

realization as well as God-realization. He propounded a scheme of life within the limits set by the law of Islam (*Shari'at*), which he considered as the true path (*Tariqat*) to the ultimate goal of attaining nearness to Allah. It must be remembered that Sufism is to follow a spiritual path based on the Quran and prophetic practice actively with the aim of gaining that illuminative knowledge (*Irfan*) which is the ultimate goal of Way.¹³

This was the emergence of *Sufism*, which began in cultural centers of the Sub-continent during the (10th A.H/ 11th A.H) as an ecstatic method of realizing the spirituality of Islam. Confined in the beginning to the purely ecstatic ideal of moral purification and asserting it as an eternal reaction to the legalistic developments and the worldliness of the political forces, Sufism soon developed the goal of communication with the Divine. The followers of renowned *Salasils* played a very significant role in the Islamic world by their preaching and literary works. They strongly condemned the materialistic life of contemporaries, urging them to develop a balance by adhering to both their material and spiritual well-being of their outstanding revolutionary role in the social, cultural, and religious life of the world. They adopted local idiom and preached message of love and universal brotherhood. Mysticism is nothing but service of humanity. They believed in equality and fraternity of humankind. They abjured narrowness of mind and opposed caste and communal barriers, which cause conflict and destroy social harmony. It covers all fields of human activity, spiritual, material, individual, social, educational, cultural, political, national, and international. *Sufi* caters for aspirations of the soul as well as for the demands of the social life. Its uniqueness lies in the spiritualizing the whole matrix of life.

Quran is the book of *Hidaya* to be thoroughly read in order to comprehend the true message of Allah for human beings to live with deep understanding of reality and through profound knowledge. God's words have to be understood according to the spirit, and develop an inner response to the *ayat*, and express it by praising Allah, seeking His forgiveness.

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- ⁴ Jalal-ud-Din Sauti, *Al-Itqan fi ulum al-Quran*, PhD dissertation, (Cairo, 1967)
- ⁵ Shahwali Ullah, *Tafhimat-e- Ilahiyya*, (Hyderabad, Sindh, 1970), pp. 15-16 & 30-117 & 278-82
- ⁶ Shahwali Ullah, *Hujjat-Allah al-Baligha*, (Al Muneeriya, 1392/1972)
- ⁷ Shahwali Ullah, *Budur-al-Bazigha*, (Bijnor,1936), p.223
- ⁸ Q.6.125
- ⁹ Shah Muhammad Ghous, *Derkasb u saluk u biyan e haqiqat u marifat*, p.8
- ¹⁰ Shah Muhammad Ghous, *Israr-ut-Towhid*, p.28
- ¹¹ Ibid., p-30
- ¹² Ibid. p. 48, 49
- ¹³ Shah Muhammad Ghous, *Der Kasb O Saluk O Haqiqat*, p.48

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Appendix: 1

“Shah Muhammad Ghous Written Works on Faith, Creed & Sharia”

S.No.	Book Manuscript	Topic / Subject	Availability / Short History Of Manuscript
1	<i>Israr-ut-Towheed</i> (Manuscript)	Synthesis of <i>Wahda-tul-Wajud</i> (Reconciliation) and <i>Wahdatul – Shahud</i> (Apprentism) in the light of Quran and Sunnah.	Manuscript written in Arabic probably in the year 1150 to 1160 A.H. Original Manuscript is owned by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy Yakatoot Peshawar (Pakistan)</i> .
2	<i>Towheed-e-Kalan</i>	Manuscript is untraced and its reference is available in <i>Asrar-ut-Towheed</i> given at Sr.No.1	Manuscript not discovered.
3	<i>Maratib-e-Suluk</i> 2 No.s. Articles (Manuscript) & <i>Sharah Fusus-ul-Hikam (Fiss-e-Adamia)</i>	Discussed different stages of Sufism like <i>Nasut</i> (Human Nature), <i>Malakut</i> (Angelic Nature) <i>Jabaroot</i> (Knowledge of Allah or Gnosis) <i>Lahoot</i> (Divine qualities) and <i>Zat-e-Beht</i> (Essence of Allah).	Original Manuscript owned by <i>Manzar-ul-Haq Siddique Rawalpindi(Pakistan)</i> . Photocopy is present in <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy Peshawar.(Pakistan)</i>
4	<i>Kasb-e-Saluk-o-Biyar-e-Haqiqat-o-Maarefat.</i> (Manuscript)	A guideline for <i>Saliks</i> (travellers of spiritual path). Discussed chapter wise different stages of Sufism and allowed the <i>Saliks</i> to follow these stages in absence of any <i>Sheikh</i> . He also narrated his meeting with the contemporaries Sufis and the <i>Fyadh</i> (emanation of God) he got or bestowed to them.	Original Manuscript owned by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy</i> (No date mentioned) Hand written copy by <i>Mir Muhiuddin Shah</i> in the year 1821 A.D present in <i>Shah Muhammad Academy</i> . Details available in catalogue of Manuscript of Pakistan & Iran by <i>Muhammad Hussain Tasbehi</i> Page 1255 – 1257.
5	<i>Jawaz-e-Dhikr-e-Jehr</i> (Manuscript)	Definition and kinds of <i>Dhikr</i> (Remembrance) Opinion of different <i>Mufassariens</i> (Commentator of Quran), <i>Muhaddisin</i> (Commentators of Hadiths) <i>Faqih</i> (Islamic Jurists) and <i>Mashiyk</i> (Sufis) of different orders on the topic of <i>Dhikr-e-jahar</i> (Remembrance publicly).	Original Manuscript in Arabic language handwritten by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus</i> probably in year 1145 to 1150 A.H. is owned by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy Peshawar (Pakistan)</i> .
6	<i>Qasida-Ghausiya (Almaroof-ba-khumriya)</i>	Explanation of selected Arabic verses of <i>Qasida</i> written by <i>Hazrat Sheikh Abdul Qadir Jillani</i> in Persian named as “ <i>Qasida Khumriya</i> ”. It is an explanation of very critical points of grammatically difficult stages, which caused confusion in minds of general public. The explanation wiped out the confusion and cleared the minds of people.	Original Manuscript is available with <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy Peshawar (Pakistan)</i> . Handwritten copies are also available at <i>Dial Singh Trust Library Lahore Catalogue Vol.III M.S. No.734 Page No.311</i> and another copy is also available at <i>Lennon Grad University Kamashekan 1-344</i> .

7	<i>Manajat</i> (Manuscript) (Intimate invocation)	A prayer in Arabic Language generally read as individually or collectively in <i>Qadria</i> order for remission of sins and blessing of <i>Allah</i> .	It has been now published by <i>Idara-e-Tableeqh-o-Ishaat Peshawar (Pakistan)</i> .
8	<i>Sharah-e-Saheeh Bukhari</i> (Persian Language) 3 Volumes (Manuscripts)	Explanation of <i>Saheeh Bukhari</i> in Persian languages (only 3 Volumes are discovered so far). The remaining volumes are untraced. Similarly <i>Tafseer-e-Quran</i> written by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus</i> was available with <i>Mollana Noor Muhammad</i> at <i>Kulachi D.I.Khan (Pakistan)</i> . But it was destroyed by flood along with his Library.	Original manuscript consisting of only 3 volumes of 1200 pages found in family collection is owned by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy Peshawar</i> . All the three volumes with Urdu translation by <i>Syed Muhammad Amir Shah Gilani</i> has been published in 1996 A.D
9	<i>Risala Usool-e-Ahdith</i> Manuscript (Arabic)	Discussed the kinds of <i>Hadiths</i> in respect of their Authenticity. These are the basic principles to understand the literature of <i>Hadiths</i> .	Original Manuscript written in Arabic 1138 A.H. is owned by <i>Shah Muhammad Ghaus Academy Peshawar</i> . Hand written copies by <i>Hafiz Ahmad Ali Jan Qadri</i> 1191 A.H are available in <i>Islamic College Library Peshawar (Pak)</i> .