

The Difference in Sufi Authors' Approach to Sama' in a Selection of Didactic Prose Treatises and hagiography books from the Fourth to the Eighth Century A.H.

Salman Saket

Associate Professor, Department of Persian Language & Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran (Corresponding Author); Email: saket@um.ac.ir

Zeinab Darvishi

M. A. in Persian language & literature, Department of Persian Language & Literature, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran; Email: zeinab.darvishi@alumni.um.ac.ir

Received: 10/07/2025

Accepted: 09/02/2026

Introduction

Sama', as a Sufi ritual reflecting the spiritual interpretation of music in Islam, holds a special place in Sufism; nevertheless, it has always elicited opposition from many jurists and ascetics. Among Sufi works, despite certain overlaps, noticeable differences exist that allow them to be categorized into separate groups. Moreover, Pournamdariyan and Pourjavadi have also classified Sufi texts into several types in their articles. This study, considering these differences and classifications, examines the practice of Sama' in a selection of Sufi instructional treatises, including *al-Luma' fi al-Tasawwuf*, the *Risālah Qushayriyah* (translation), *Kashf al-Mahjūb*, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (translation), *Misbah al-Hidāyah*, and *Awrad al-Aḥbāb*, as well as in Sufi hagiographical works, including *Asrār al-Tawhīd*, *Firdaws al-Murshidiyah*, *Ṣafwah al-Ṣafā*, *Manaqib al-'Arifīn*, and *Manaqib-i Awhad al-Dīn Kirmānī*, with attention to the authors' differing approaches to Sama' in these two categories of texts. The data collection method is library-based, and the research method is content analysis.

Research Findings

This study attempts to examine, based on these two categories of Sufi works, the differences in approach and the distinct objectives of the authors when writing about Sama'. It should be noted that no research has previously addressed this specific aim. These differences have been analyzed under the following headings: theoretical Sama' / practical Sama', practices in Sama' gatherings, involuntary Sama' / situational Sama', and the justification of Sama'. The earliest extant instructional treatises by Sufis, which devote a chapter to Sama', were composed in the fourth century AH. These treatises instructed disciples in key Sufi topics, including Sama', with the authors—especially in the early centuries—endeavoring to justify these practices through references to the *Qur'an* and Hadith. In contrast, Sufi hagiographical texts (*siyar*) do not primarily aim to justify or teach Sufi practices and doctrines; rather, they aim to display the power of the masters (*shuyūkh*) and their

superiority over other disciples and Sufis, essentially legitimizing their authority and actions. This distinction explains why the approach of authors to Sufi topics, including Sama', in instructional treatises differs from that in siyar. Furthermore, differences are also observed among the approaches of the siyar authors themselves.

Conclusion

The primary difference in the approach of Sufi authors to Sama' in instructional treatises versus siyar texts is that authors of instructional treatises focus on the theoretical aspects of Sama', whereas siyar texts emphasize its practical aspects. Sufi authors in instructional treatises stress the individual and abstract nature of Sama' gatherings, using this framework to teach disciples the correct method of Sama'. In siyar texts, however, Sama' gatherings are described within the social context of Sufi communities, highlighting the superiority of masters over their peers, and the activities performed during these gatherings are more varied. These texts also show that the masters often responded more strictly to the ecstatic expressions (wajd) of the Sufis. Another notable difference is the attention to unorthodox practices within Sama' in siyar texts. A further distinction concerns involuntary or situational Sama': in instructional treatises, Sama' performed on specific occasions is generally prohibited, and most narratives refer to involuntary Sama' whose time and place are unspecified. Conversely, in works such as *Manaqib al-'Ārifīn*, there are references to the performance of Sama' at various occasions. The final difference pertains to the justification of Sama'. In instructional treatises, authors justify Sama' by citing evidence from the Qur'an and Hadith, whereas in siyar texts, Sama' is equated with prayer, or masters justify it through coercive acts against opponents, asserting their superiority in the practice of Sama'.

Keywords: Sama', Tasawuf, Didactic Treatises, hagiography books, approach.