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## THE PLACE OF THE SEBK-I HINDI STYLE IN AZERBAIJANI AND TURKISH POETIC TRADITION (17TH–18TH CENTURIES)

### Abstract

“Sebk-i Hindî” is a stylistic movement that has exerted a significant influence on classical Ottoman and Azerbaijani poetry since the seventeenth century. This article examines the historical development of “Sebk-i Hindî,” its aesthetic characteristics, and its reflections in both literary traditions. The aim of the study is to present, in a comparative manner, the shared and distinctive features of the style in the two literatures. A comparative literature approach is adopted as the main methodological principle. The findings of the research demonstrate the semantic intensity, abstract imagery, and aesthetic richness that “Sebk-i Hindî” introduced into classical poetry.

**Keywords:** Sebk-i Hindi, semantics, Ottoman, Azerbaijani, classical poetry

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### Introduction

Sebk-i Hindî represents a distinctive stylistic approach within classical Divan poetry. While the term *sebk* denotes “style,” the designation *Hindî* indicates that this approach emerged under the influence of India. This style developed within the tradition of Persian poetry in Iran and India and was subsequently transmitted to the Ottoman and Azerbaijani literary spheres. Sebk-i Hindî gained particular prominence in the seventeenth century, when the search for new modes of expression became a defining concern of classical poetry. During this period, poets sought a style characterized by semantic richness and imaginative complexity.

Sebk-i Hindî is a significant poetic style that originated within Persian literature, developing in India from the fourteenth century onward and exerting wide-ranging influence across an extensive geographical area primarily in Iranian, Indian, and Turkic literatures after the seventeenth century. Literally meaning “Indian style” or “Indian manner,” the term denotes a poetic approach cultivated by Iranian and Turkic poets on the Muslim Indian subcontinent,

characterized by intense intellectual engagement and a refined, intricate, and complex imaginative structure.

### Main part

The formation of Sebk-i Hindî was shaped by a range of political, social, and cultural factors. During the Safavid period, the sectarian and oppressive environment prevailing in Iran prompted poets to seek a more liberal literary atmosphere in India. Moreover, the interest and patronage shown by Muslim Turkic rulers in India toward Persian literature and Persian-speaking poets constituted significant factors supporting the development of this style. As Y. E. Bertels observes, the well-known “Indian style” is not a geographical or national phenomenon, but rather to a large extent a social one (8, 439).

According to scholars, cultural and literary interactions between Iran and India, the intensification of Shi’i fanaticism following the establishment of the national state in Iran, and the influence of Indian language, culture, and geography transmitted through the migration of poets played a decisive role in the emergence of

the *Sebk-i Hindî* style. Poets who adopted this style, influenced by their experience of living within a foreign cultural environment, turned inward and constructed their poetry primarily on a mental and abstract plane. This inward orientation led to the centralization of meaning in poetry and to the use of images, metaphors, and similes developed through extremely subtle and deliberate calculations. In this respect, *Sebk-i Hindî* poetry is distinguished by its multilayered semantic structures, intense associative networks, and profound intellectual depth. *Sebk-i Hindî* poets primarily emphasized the two fundamental elements of poetry: word and meaning. However, the word was not regarded as a merely secondary component; rather, it was valued as a medium that conveys and deepens meaning. Within this context, poets assigned new functions to language and sought to expand its aesthetic potential. As noted by Mina Mengi, representatives of the *Sebk-i Hindî* style, which left a significant mark on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century *Divan* poetry, sought subtle and delicate meanings, often referred to as *mani-i nazik* (“fine meaning”). They contributed substantially to the semantic dimension of poetry through original metaphors and rich associative networks that emphasized imaginative depth. In this regard, *Sebk-i Hindî* can be regarded as a remarkable literary style in *Divan* poetry, representing a meaning-centered transformation. The main characteristics of *Sebk-i Hindî* include the intensity of imagination, depth of meaning, use of abstract imagery, and innovation in similes. Poets employed unusual metaphors and wordplay within traditional forms to provoke thought in the reader and to deepen the semantic layers of their poetry. Language in *Sebk-i Hindî* acquired an ornamental and intricate structure, and an abstract mode of expression developed beyond the bounds of classical meaning. In this respect, *Sebk-i Hindî* emerged as a representative of a distinct aesthetic conception within *Divan* poetry. In the *Sebk-i Hindî* style, meaning occupies a primary and decisive position relative to the verbal element. The style anticipates that meaning will be expansive, profound, veiled, and complex, while subtlety and delicacy of meaning are considered central aesthetic criteria. Poets of the *Sebk-i Hindî* style regarded the value of

poetry primarily in the multilayered network of meaning. Indeed, to concretize this conception, one notable example is Sa‘ib-i Tabrîzî, a leading exponent of the style, who remarked, “I became as delicate as a hair to reach subtle meanings.” Similarly, Shovkat emphasizes that in poetry, meaning should exhibit an interwoven and difficult-to-decipher structure, akin to “the threads of a carpet.” Historically, while the aesthetic value of words was prioritized in Arabic literature, in Persian literature emphasis shifted between words and meaning depending on the period. However, *Sebk-i Hindî* represents a poetic approach that explicitly centers meaning within this dual structure. In this regard, *Sebk-i Hindî* poets deliberately sought to create profound and multilayered meanings, transforming poetry into a domain of high intellectual intensity. The prioritization of meaning is one of the distinguishing features of the *Sebk-i Hindî* style and represents a common tendency among nearly all its practitioners.

Excessive imagination is another notable characteristic of *Sebk-i Hindî*. Imagination is considered one of the essential elements that constitute poetry and is often discussed alongside the concept of inspiration. However, in *Sebk-i Hindî*, compared to classical conceptions of poetry, reason is relegated to the background, while imagination assumes a decisive role. In this style, imagination primarily substitutes for reality; poetry is constructed more on a mental and imaginative plane than on the concrete world.

*Sebk-i Hindî* poets consciously chose to prioritize imagination and the subtlety of thought in their poetry. While this choice sometimes made the poems difficult to comprehend, the poets did not compromise on the depth of imagination or the richness of meaning. The intricate and complex semantic structures, intertwined with elaborate imagery, often rendered the couplets obscure and challenging to interpret. Consequently, *Sebk-i Hindî* poets were frequently criticized for the perceived “incomprehensibility” of their work. However, evaluating *Sebk-i Hindî* solely on the basis of excessive imagination would be an incomplete approach. Kamer-i Aryan, who has made significant observations on this subject, notes

that Sebk-i Hindî poets also incorporated a certain degree of realism into their expressions (1, 179). According to Aryan, the traditionally abstract and concealed conception of love in classical ghazals was reinterpreted by poets of this period through the realities and concrete experiences of everyday life. In particular, the relationship between the lover and the beloved was moved entirely out of the purely imaginary realm and assumed qualities that could be encountered in daily life.

In this respect, although Sebk-i Hindî is based on intense imagination, it reflects a multidimensional understanding of poetry that is occasionally nourished by real elements. Suffering and distress emerge as one of the principal emotional themes in Sebk-i Hindî poetry. This sentiment primarily stems from the disappointments, misfortunes, and unfulfilled expectations observed among the poets of the period. Such suffering imbued the emotional world of the poets with a melancholic tone intertwined with pessimism a pessimism that became a habitual mode of thought for many poets of the era (1, 186).

It can be argued that suffering and distress in Sebk-i Hindî poetry are reflected in literary texts drawn from three main sources. The first is the transformation of suffering into a characteristic feature of the style itself. The second source is the extremely harsh and oppressive social, economic, and political conditions of the period in which the poets lived. The third, and arguably the most decisive, element is the personal problems of certain poets of the era particularly in Turkic poetry which stemmed from their individual identities and life experiences. The personal traits of poets such as Naili, Şehri, and Fehim, combined with the harsh conditions they were forced to endure, left profound impressions on their inner worlds; this contributed to these poets being referred to as “poets of suffering,” similar to Fuzuli. Although it is generally accepted that the theme of suffering is primarily explored in the ghazal form, this sentiment is also effectively employed in other poetic forms. Indeed, it has been noted that some of Şehri’s qasidas and terc-i band (rhymed narrative poems) contain verses filled with expressions of suffering (4, 8). This phenomenon is not unique

to certain poets of the Sebk-i Hindî style; rather, it can be considered a characteristic reflecting the general tendencies of the style as a whole. It is well established that exaggeration is used intensively and extensively in the *Sebk-i Hindî* style. Since its practitioners were oriented toward expansive and limitless imagination, exaggeration became an inevitable expressive tool for conveying emotions, thoughts, and fantasies in poetry. In particular, exaggeration was frequently employed as an artistic device in expressing suffering, one of the central themes of Sebk-i Hindî. Indeed, many poets produced exemplary works in this regard that achieved an exceptionally high level of expressive intensity. On the other hand, the prioritization of meaning over words in poetry facilitated the creation of a broader and deeper imaginative world, which in turn provided a basis for exaggeration to attract greater attention within the poetic expression. However, this form of expression, based on excessive exaggeration, sometimes hindered the reader’s ability to visualize the poem, resulting in couplets with opaque and difficult-to-comprehend structures. In this context, exaggeration can be regarded both as a distinctive feature and as one of the aspects of Sebk-i Hindî poetry that is open to criticism.

The active role of Sufis in the spread of Islam in the regions of Iran and India led to a more pronounced manifestation of the mystical, Sufi dimension of the religion in these areas. With religious and juridical aspects relatively relegated to the background, this understanding permeated nearly all social strata, exerting influence across a wide spectrum—from state officials to ordinary people. Naturally, this environment affected the poets of the period and provided fertile ground for the intensive exploration of Sufi themes in poetry. Among Sebk-i Hindî poets, the exploration of Sufi themes in poetry became a widespread tendency, regardless of whether the poets were directly involved in Sufi life. This approach eventually found expression in Turkic literature as well. In particular, poets such as Naili, Neşati, Şehri, Fehim, and Şeyh Gâlib extensively incorporated Sufi elements into their works. The fact that Sebk-i Hindî is a poetic style focused more on the inner world of the individual on spiritual depth,

emotions, and especially suffering made the inclusion of Sufi themes in this style almost inevitable. However, *Sebk-i Hindî* poets employed Sufism primarily as a means to create profound and veiled meanings, rather than approaching it with the authentic Sufi perspective found in classical poetry. Sufi concepts and images often functioned not as directly didactic elements but as symbolic devices that deepened the layers of meaning within the poem. One of the central aesthetic principles of the *Sebk-i Hindî* style is the pursuit of original meanings and metaphors, often described as the quest for “never-before-used meaning.” Poets of this style deliberately avoided the metaphors commonly employed and eventually standardized in classical poetry, striving instead to create new semantic realms and original imagery. In this respect, they expanded the themes and imagery of poetry by drawing upon both social life and nature. *Sebk-i Hindî* poets focused on themes and metaphors drawn from everyday life rather than the traditional subjects of classical poetry. They incorporated numerous elements commonly encountered in daily experience, thereby achieving a significant innovation in this area. This approach not only enriched the semantic world of poetry but also expanded the boundaries of poetic language. Indeed, in accordance with the demands of the style, poets demonstrated remarkable success in employing diverse and novel words and expressions to create original metaphors. The pursuit of simple meaning and content prompted *Sebk-i Hindî* poets to explore new linguistic possibilities. This process led to the incorporation of certain expressions from colloquial speech into poetic language. Thus, *Sebk-i Hindî* occupies a distinctive place in the Divan poetry tradition, not only in terms of the worlds of meaning and imagination but also with regard to the development and enrichment of language. The artistic device of contrast is based on the principle of bringing together contradictory concepts within the same individual, object, or situation. *Sebk-i Hindî* poets evaluated their subjects from multiple perspectives, and as a result of this multifaceted approach, they often sought to employ opposing meanings and metaphors within the same

context. This practice not only enhanced the depth of meaning in the poem but also generated a form of expression that stimulated the reader’s intellectual engagement. Unlike contrast, the concept of paradoxical imagery involves combining contradictory relationships within the same expression or statement to create a new, original, and contradictory semantic domain. The purpose of such imagery is not merely to juxtapose opposing ideas but also to generate an unusual and striking meaning through them. Therefore, paradoxical imagery should not be confused with the classical art of contrast; it should be understood as the product of the poet’s deliberate effort to create tension and innovation in meaning. The use of paradoxical imagery in *Sebk-i Hindî* poetry is particularly evident in Persian literature, especially in the works of *Bidil-i Dihlevî*. In *Bidil*’s poetry, contradictory concepts function not only as aesthetic elements but also as fundamental devices that enhance intellectual depth. In this respect, both contrast and paradoxical imagery are important indicators of *Sebk-i Hindî*’s meaning-centered and intellectually intensive poetic approach. In *Sebk-i Hindî* poetry, the expression of abstract ideas through concrete elements emerges as a significant feature. In this respect, this characteristic might initially be confused with the art of *irsal-i masal* (a form of proverbial expression). However, in *Sebk-i Hindî*, poets prefer to rely on their own original and creative examples to concretize abstract concepts, rather than depending on proverbs or fixed expressions previously used by others. This approach allows individual imagination and original expression to occupy a central place in the poetry. Verses containing concrete information are often brief in terms of words but dense and rich in meaning, which makes them easy to memorize. At the same time, these verses acquire a quality that allows them to be used as examples in various contexts. Furthermore, in *Sebk-i Hindî* poetry, the juxtaposition of abstract and concrete concepts demonstrates the frequent use of the art of embodiment. This technique can be considered an important element that deepens the layers of meaning within the poem. In Western languages, the term “synesthesia” primarily has a neurological connotation, but it has also been



employed as a literary narrative technique. Referred to as *hiss-âmezî* by Iranian stylistic scholars and translated into Turkish as “multiple senses,” this feature arises from the interchangeable use of perceptions from different sense organs or from the blending of concepts associated with various senses within a single expression. In Sebki-Hindî poetry, the use of multiple senses is considered an important narrative device that enriches the world of imagination and meaning. Through this technique, poets combine sensory perceptions in unconventional ways to create strong and evocative associations in the reader’s mind.

Another notable feature of Sebki-Hindî is the extensive presence of natural elements and the social life of the community in the poems. However, rather than representing nature and social life directly and objectively, the poets of this style treated them as reflections of their inner worlds and mental perceptions. Therefore, depictions of nature and society in the poetry should be understood as products of the poet’s subjective perspective.

This approach bears similarities to some fundamental features of Western art and poetry movements such as Symbolism and Impressionism, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, Sebki-Hindî poets used social life and nature as a means to express their emotions and thoughts. The transformation of nature into a reflection of the poet’s inner world led to the embodiment of beings. Consequently, embodiment became a frequently employed narrative device in Sebki-Hindî poetry.

In Sebki-Hindî poetry, metaphors and similes are often obscure and difficult to comprehend. This can be attributed to the poets’ deliberate tendency to move away from ordinary, everyday, and widely familiar semantic patterns. This tendency manifests in their effort to choose the object of comparison—a central element of simile—outside traditional mental associations (1, 183). In this context, Sebki-Hindî poets preferred to create more original, striking, and intellectually demanding images instead of conventional comparisons.

The period from the formation of classical poetry up to the seventeenth century can

generally be regarded as a transitional phase from simile to metaphor. This transformation also reflects the gradual refinement, concentration, and abstraction of poetic language. Indeed, similes that initially contained explicit elements of comparison gradually gave way to metaphors—either explicit or implicit—condensed into a single word. However, this profound change in poetic language led to an increasing veiling of meaning and made the comprehension of poems more difficult. As Kamer-i Aryan notes, the concealment of semantic bridges between the poet and the reader within similes and metaphors considerably complicated the poetic language (1, 183). Although the use of parables and proverbs may initially appear as a common feature of didactic poetry or poetry in general, for Sebki-Hindî poets it emerges as an indispensable element of expression. In this context, as Kamer-i Aryan notes, parables and maxims “can be regarded as a means of expression created to reflect the argumentative style, taste, and intellectual world of ordinary people while conveying extraordinary claims” (1, 183).

The understanding and employment of proverbs, idioms, and brief expressions as proverbial elements added both vitality and diversity to the semantic world of Sebki-Hindî. These elements enabled the concrete and effective expression of abstract ideas in poetry and, over time, became one of the distinguishing features of Sebki-Hindî poetry. Thus, parables and maxims were not merely tools to reinforce expression; they became fundamental components that shaped the aesthetic structure of the style.

Didacticism is also evident in the Sebki-Hindî style. While this approach may initially evoke the *Hikemî* style, it is in fact an essential characteristic of Sebki-Hindî, much like other stylistic features. This attribute is shared by both Sebki-Hindî and *Hikemî* styles. A theme frequently encountered in classical poetry, often reflected through a *rindâne* mode of expression, is the belief in the transience of the world. Although this theme appears prominently in earlier Persian poetry, particularly in the works of Khayyâm and Hâfîz, in the hands of Sebki-Hindî poets it became an important aesthetic

element that deepened the semantic dimension of poetry.

In the poetry of Sâib-i Tebrizî, Urfi, Feyzî, and Bidîl, the discourse on the transience of the world emerges as a central feature that reinforces the meaning of the poem and enhances its impact on the reader. In classical poetry, this theme was explored by poets representing both the Sebk-i Hindî style and the Hikemî tradition, and it was reflected in various poetic forms. From this perspective, the theme of the transience of the world serves as a point of intersection between these two distinct styles, contributing to the poem both in terms of semantic depth and aesthetic value. Compared to Sebk-i Irâqî and other classical styles, Sebk-i Hindî exhibits a more complex and abstract structure. While Sebk-i Irâqî employs a more comprehensible and fluent language, Sebk-i Hindî poets preferred a denser and more intricate diction that guides the reader in the pursuit of meaning. Stylistic debates in literature, particularly the seventeenth-century critics' remarks on the "heavy and obscure language," reflect this tension. In classical Divan poetry, words and meaning are generally viewed as complementary elements, although the aesthetics of words is often prioritized. Harmony, balance, and meter in words are considered among the fundamental values of poetry. In Sebk-i Hindî, however, meaning is valued more highly than words. Poets are more concerned with the depth and richness of meaning than with the harmony of words. Consequently, the notion of "simple meaning / simple imagery" comes to the fore in Sebk-i Hindî poetry, with poets abandoning traditional imagery in favor of creating new and original meanings and imaginative constructs.

Classical poetry generally maintains a more balanced relationship between imagination and reality, with imaginative elements primarily supported by concrete and comprehensible images. In Sebk-i Hindî, by contrast, excessive imagination is prominent. Poets replace reality with visions and mental images, constructing poetry on an abstract and intellectual plane. While this approach can make comprehension more difficult, the poets do not compromise on the subtlety of their imagination and thought.

In classical poetry, suffering and sorrow are usually presented in moderation, within the frameworks of love and Sufi themes. In Sebk-i Hindî, however, suffering is a more intense and personal experience. Poets such as Naili, Şehri, and Fehim, influenced by their life experiences and personal traits, infused their poetry with profound grief and melancholy, earning them recognition as "poets of suffering."

In classical poetry, exaggeration is generally measured and limited to specific themes, whereas in Sebk-i Hindî, exaggeration becomes almost a fundamental element of poetry. Poets employ exaggerated expressions to enhance the depth of meaning and the richness of imagination, making the poetry both striking and, at times, difficult to comprehend.

Classical poetry, particularly Persian and Ottoman, explores Sufi themes within both personal and spiritual frameworks. In Sebk-i Hindî, however, Sufism is primarily perceived as a reflection of the poet's inner world. Poets use Sufi concepts not as direct didactic tools but as symbolic elements that deepen the layers of meaning within the poem.

In classical poetry, social life and nature often function as background or stage settings. In Sebk-i Hindî, however, social life and nature are employed as reflections of the poet's inner world and emotions. The focus shifts from the external to the internal, with natural and social events serving as mediums to express feelings and thoughts.

The theme of the "transience of the world" in classical poetry is generally approached from a mystical or spiritual perspective. In Sebk-i Hindî, particularly in the works of Sâib-i Tebrizî, Urfi, Feyzî, and Bidîl, this theme emerges as an element that enhances semantic depth. Both Sebk-i Hindî and certain representatives of the classical style engage with this theme, creating a shared point of intersection in their poetry.

Although classical poetry and the Sebk-i Hindî style differ both technically and thematically, certain points of intersection can also be observed. Classical poetry presents a more orderly and balanced structure with its linguistic aesthetics, meter, and comprehensible metaphors, whereas Sebk-i Hindî enriches and complicates poetry through its emphasis on

meaning, excessive imagination, exaggeration, paradoxical imagery, and profound emotional tone. By modifying the forms of classical poetry and highlighting meaning, Sebk-i Hindî introduced innovations in both language and aesthetics.

Azerbaijani classical poetry developed under the influence of Persian and Turkish literary traditions. The forms of *qoşma* and *ghazal* were widely used, with themes of Sufism, love, and wisdom taking prominence. In terms of literary richness, metaphorical diversity, and aesthetic value, it established a distinct structure.

Sebk-i Hindî was introduced into Azerbaijani literature, particularly through poets such as Sâib-i Tebrizî. The cultural and literary interactions with the Iranian milieu facilitated the adoption of this style. Azerbaijani poets increased semantic density and introduced innovation in metaphor without altering the classical couplet structure.

Both Azerbaijani and Ottoman poets applied Sebk-i Hindî particularly through abstract imagery, profound meaning, and veiled metaphors. The lyric works of Sâib-i Tebrizî, Vaiz Qazvini, Murtazâqulu Sultan Shamlû, Naili, Neşati, Şeyh Gâlib, and Vahid Qazvini exemplify the characteristic features of this style. For instance, the intensity of imagery and the depth of meaning in the couplets are clearly evident. Poets employed unusual metaphors and similes to engage and challenge the reader's intellectual faculties.

### **Conclusion**

Sebk-i Hindî holds a significant place in Azerbaijani and Ottoman poetic traditions in terms of semantic depth, abstract imagery, and innovative metaphor. The style enriched classical poetry aesthetically and guided poets toward new forms of expression. Future research could include more comprehensive studies on the influence of Sebk-i Hindî on contemporary

literature and on individual poetical interpretations.

When observing the developmental dynamics of the Hindî style in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century classical Azerbaijani and Ottoman-Turkish literature, the most prominent representatives in Ottoman Divan poetry are Naili, Neşati, Nabi, and Şeyh Gâlib. In Azerbaijan, during the same period, the Hindî style can be traced in the works of Sâib-i Tebrizî, Vaiz Qazvini, Murtazâqulu Sultan Shamlû, and Vahid Qazvini. Compared to Ottoman poetry, where the style often manifests within a narrower framework and with simpler expressions in terms of meaning, the Hindî style influenced both literatures with its distinctive nuances.

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ÜSLUBUNUN YERİ**

**Xülasə**

"Sebk-i Hindî" XVII əsrdən bəri klassik Osmanlı və Azərbaycan poeziyasında təsirli olan bir üslub hərəkatıdır. Bu məqalədə "Sebk-i Hindî"nin tarixi inkişafı, estetik xüsusiyyətləri və hər iki ədəbi ənənədəki əks-sədalı araşdırılır. Məqalənin məqsədi üslubun hər iki ədəbiyyatda da ortaqlıq və fərqli cəhətlərini müqayisəli şəkildə təqdim etməkdir. Müqayisəli ədəbiyyat yanaşması əsas prinsip olaraq qəbul edilmişdir. Tədqiqatın nəticələri "Sebk-i Hindî"nin klassik poeziyaya gətirdiyi semantik intensivliyi, mücərrəd obrazları və estetik zənginliyi nümayiş etdirir.

**Açar sözlər:** Sebk-i Hindî, semantik, Osmanlı, Azərbaycan, klassik poeziya

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**МЕСТО СТИЛЯ СЕБК-И ХИНД В АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКОЙ И ТУРЕЦКОЙ  
ПОЭТИЧЕСКОЙ ТРАДИЦИИ (XVII–XVIII ВЕКА)**

**Резюме**

«Себк-и хиндй» — это стилистическое направление, оказавшее значительное влияние на классическую османскую и азербайджанскую поэзию начиная с XVII века. В данной статье исследуются историческое развитие «Себк-и хиндй», его эстетические особенности и отражение в обеих литературных традициях. Цель статьи — в сравнительном плане представить общие и отличительные черты данного стиля в обеих литературах. В качестве основного методологического принципа принят подход сравнительного литературоведения. Результаты исследования демонстрируют семантическую интенсивность, абстрактную образность и эстетическое богатство, принесённые «Себк-и хиндй» в классическую поэзию.

**Ключевые слова:** Себк-и хиндй, семантика, Османская, Азербайджанская, классическая поэзия

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