

## Exploring Shikhar Taal – The Majestic 17-Beat Cycle

If you thought rhythms in Indian classical music stopped at Teentaal (16 beats) or Ektaal (12 beats), prepare to go one beat beyond! **Shikhar Taal**, a majestic and relatively rare rhythmic cycle, boasts **17 beats**, giving it a regal and expansive feel that challenges even seasoned tabla players.

### What is Shikhar Taal?

**Shikhar Taal** (pronounced: **Shik-har**) is a **17-beat rhythmic cycle** used mainly in **dhrupad**, **Haveli Sangeet**, and **instrumental music**. The word "*Shikhar*" means *peak* or *summit*, fitting for a taal that demands such rhythmic precision and artistry.

Though less commonly used than Adi Taal (Teentaal) or Jhaptaal, Shikhar Taal offers a rich framework for complex compositions. It's a taal that gives artists room to explore elaborate rhythmic variations and layakari (tempo play).

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### Structure of Shikhar Taal

Shikhar Taal has **17 matras (beats)**, grouped in a **6 + 6 + 5** configuration:

#### Vibhag Matras Clap/Wave

1st	6	Clap (1)
2nd	6	Clap (7)
3rd	5	Wave (13)

So, the clapping pattern goes:

**Clap – Clap – Wave**

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### Theka of Shikhar Taal (Basic)

Here's the **basic theka** of Shikhar Taal in **Vilambit (slow) tempo**:

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Dha Dhin Dhin Dha | Dha Tin Tin Ta | Tit Dha - | Dhin Dhin Dha |

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

Broken down by **vibhag**:

1. **First Vibhag (6 beats):**  
Dha Dhin Dhin Dha Dha Tin
2. **Second Vibhag (6 beats):**  
Tin Ta Tit Dha - Dhin
3. **Third Vibhag (5 beats):**  
Dhin Dha

👉 The dash “-” indicates a rest or silent beat (khali).

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### **Audio Sample: Shikhar Taal Theka**

🎵 [Listen to Shikhar Taal Theka – Slow Tempo \(Vilambit\)](#)

(Courtesy: Pt. Suresh Talwalkar – Live Tabla Demonstration)

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### **Why is Shikhar Taal Challenging?**

- **Odd beat cycles** (like 17) don't divide evenly into typical Western time signatures.
  - Composers love using it for **Dhrupad compositions**, where long phrases can unfold without feeling rushed.
  - It allows space for **complex tihais**, bol combinations, and rhythmic improvisations.
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### **Use in Classical Compositions**

**Dhrupad vocalists** like the **Dagar Brothers** have traditionally used Shikhar Taal for stately, slow-tempo compositions. Its grandeur suits the deep, meditative style of Dhrupad.

In **instrumental music**, maestros like **Pandit Kishan Maharaj** and **Ustad Zakir Hussain** have used Shikhar Taal for experimental compositions.

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### **A Tihai in Shikhar Taal**

Here's an example of a **tihai** (a phrase repeated 3 times ending on sum):

**Tihai:**

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Dha Ge Na | Dha Ge Na | Dha Ge Na Dha

Let's say this starts at beat 13 (the start of the last vibhag). You'll notice the phrase resolves on beat 1 — very satisfying to the ear!

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### Shikhar in Modern Music?

While Shikhar Taal is primarily a classical taal, its structure is sometimes adapted in **fusion and contemporary compositions** where unusual time signatures are explored. Bands experimenting with **Indian jazz fusion** or **progressive Indian classical** might incorporate its structure subtly.

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### Summary

- **Taal Name:** Shikhar
  - **Beats (Matras):** 17
  - **Vibhag Structure:** 6 + 6 + 5
  - **Claps/Waves:** Clap – Clap – Wave
  - **Common Tempo:** Vilambit (slow), but also used in Madhya and Drut
  - **Genre:** Dhrupad, Haveli Sangeet, Instrumental
  - **Challenge Level:** Advanced
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