

# Sool Taal Unraveled: The Art of Mukhda, Mohra & Tihai – 10 Beat Rhythm Explained

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## Introduction

Indian classical music thrives on intricate rhythms, and among the many taals (rhythmic cycles), Sool Taal (also spelled "Sul Tal" or "Sul Taal") stands out with its 10-beat structure and unique compositional charm. Though less commonly performed than Teentaal or Ektaal, Sool Taal is a treasure trove of rhythmic creativity, especially in Pakhawaj and Tabla solo compositions.

In this blog post, we'll explore three essential components that breathe life into this taal: Mukhda, Mohra, and Tihai. These are not just technical elements—they are the soul of any tabla composition and act as musical signatures that showcase a player's artistry and control.

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## What is Sool Taal?

Sool Taal is a 10-beat taal traditionally associated with the Pakhawaj repertoire, but it is also interpreted beautifully on the tabla. It's structured as 5+5, creating a powerful balance between symmetry and complexity.

## Theka (Basic Structure):

Dha Dhin Na Dha Tin Dha Dhin Na Tin Na

- Vibhags (divisions): 2 (each of 5 beats)
- Clap (Tali): on beat 1 and 6
- Khali (wave): on beat 6 is a clap, not a wave, which sets it apart from Teentaal or Jhaptal.

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## Unpacking the Terms: Mukhda, Mohra & Tihai

### 1. Mukhda – The Rhythmic "Face"

Mukhda means "face" or "opening." In tabla, it's the entry point into a composition—usually a short, catchy phrase that leads into the sam (first beat of the taal cycle).

Example of a Mukhda in Sool Taal:

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Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana - Dha

- The key feature of a mukhda is that it always ends on sam.
- It acts as a musical cue, often used in improvisation to return to the cycle's beginning.

### 2. Mohra – The Decorative Passage

Mohra is longer than a mukhda and more intricate. It often has three parts and includes repetition or variation, with rhythmic flourishes that increase in intensity.

Example of a Mohra:

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Dha - Terekita Terekita Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana - Dha

Dha - Terekita Terekita Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana - Dha

Dha - Terekita Terekita Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana - Dha (sam)

- It's not necessarily a tihai, but it shares structural features like repetition and resolution.
- Used as a transition, building energy before concluding sections.

### 3. Tihai – The Rhythmic Finale

Tihai is a triple-repetition phrase that lands precisely on the sam, often used as a cadence or conclusion. In Sool Taal, crafting a Tihai that resolves on the 10th beat requires deep mathematical understanding.

Basic Tihai Example (Simple):

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Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana | Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana | Dha - Tita Kata Gadi Gana

- Each phrase is carefully timed so that the third repetition ends on sam (10th beat).
- Tihai can range from simple to extremely complex, with internal divisions and syncopations.

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### Sool Taal in Performance

Though not as mainstream in Bollywood or pop fusion, Sool Taal has been featured in classical tabla solos by maestros like Pt. Kishan Maharaj and Pt. Suresh Talwalkar. In Kathak performances, it's often used to demonstrate complex footwork and rhythmic alignment.

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### Why Mukhda, Mohra & Tihai Matter

These three elements aren't just "decorations"—they form the skeleton of improvisation and composition. A tabla player's ability to weave these into a solo reflects their:

- Command over laya (tempo)
- Mathematical timing
- Aesthetic sense of balance and drama

When used skillfully, they draw the audience in, creating moments of surprise and resolution that are both cerebral and emotional.

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### Try It Yourself: A Simple Interactive Tihai Quiz

Which of the following is a correct Tihai landing on the 10th beat of Sool Taal?

- A) Dha - Terekita Dha x 3 starting on beat 1
- B) Dha - Dhin Na | Dha - Dhin Na | Dha - Dhin Na starting on beat 4
- C) Tita Kata Gadi Gana | Tita Kata Gadi Gana | Tita Kata Gadi Gana starting on beat 2

 **Answer: Option C (correct placement and phrasing to land on 10th beat)**

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### Conclusion

Sool Taal may not be the most commonly heard rhythm in popular Indian music, but for students of tabla and classical rhythm, it is a deep well of expressive and mathematical beauty. The artistry of Mukhda, Mohra, and Tihai within this 10-beat cycle offers a masterclass in timing, creativity, and control.