

Ektaal 12-Beat Farmaishi Tihai: A Journey into Tabla Rhythm

The tabla is not simply an instrument of beats; it is an instrument of language, mathematics, expression, and emotion. Among the many rhythmic forms performed by tabla players, the Farmaishi Tihai in Ektaal is an excellent example of how rhythm can be carefully designed to create a powerful and satisfying musical conclusion. It combines the 12-beat cycle of Ektaal with a repeated rhythmic phrase that arrives at sam, the first and most important beat of the taal.

Understanding Ektaal

Ektaal is one of the important taals of Hindustani classical music. It contains 12 matras (beats) and is traditionally divided into six vibhags, with two matras in each section:

$$2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 = 12$$

A commonly taught form of Ektaal theka is:

Dhin Dhin | DhaGe TirKit | Tu Na | Kat Ta | Dhin Dhin | DhaGe TirKit

Different gharanas and traditions may use variations in the bols, but the basic 12-beat framework remains the same.

The most important point in Ektaal, as in other Hindustani rhythmic cycles, is sam. Sam is the first beat of the cycle and provides the point of rhythmic resolution. A skilled tabla player creates tension through rhythmic phrases and then brings the composition back to sam with precision.

What Is a Tihai?

The word Tihai refers to a rhythmic phrase that is performed three times, generally with carefully calculated spacing so that the final repetition lands on sam.

For example, if a phrase is:

A – gap – A – gap – A

the player calculates the phrase and gaps so that the third and final statement finishes exactly on sam.

A tihai therefore involves both musical creativity and mathematical calculation. The listener may simply hear an exciting rhythmic ending, while the performer is simultaneously counting the beats and subdivisions internally.

What Makes a Farmaishi Tihai Special?

A Farmaishi Tihai is a particularly attractive form of tihai because its structure creates a strong sense of anticipation and resolution. It is often used as a requested or specially presented rhythmic composition in tabla performance