
Lighting and music design in Marathi theatre: Importance, necessity, and the evolving nature of these techniques”

Dr. Tukaram Harishchandra Devkar

Shri Panditguru Pardikar College ,Sirsala Parli Vaijnath Dist. Beed

Article Received: 24/01/2026**Article Accepted:** 25/02/2026**Published Online:** 26/02/2026**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.01.427

Abstract

Marathi theatre, originating in the mid-19th century with Vishnudas Bhave's mythological productions, has evolved from a tradition of simple, stylized, and folk-inspired presentations into a sophisticated, multi-dimensional art form. This paper examines the critical role of lighting and music design, tracing their journey from rudimentary necessities to integral, artistic elements of the modern Marathi stage.

Initially, Marathi theatre relied on traditional, natural light sources such as oil-fueled *divas* or *mashals* (torches) and subsequently, pressure lamps (Petromax). The advent of electricity and, in the 20th century, advanced, specialized lighting equipment revolutionised stagecraft, transforming lighting from simple illumination into an "allied art" that shapes emotional content and creates plastic forms in space. Similarly, music has been the soul of Marathi theatre since its inception, with *Sangeet Natak* (musical drama) in the late 19th century formalizing the use of *Natyasangeet*—a blend of classical and semi-classical music used to highlight emotional content and dramatic action.

The necessity of these techniques lies in their ability to reinforce the narrative, enhance acting, and bridge the gap between performers and audience. The evolution from the 19th-century mythological plays to the 1960s' experimental, realistic, and absurdist drama (led by playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar and Satish Alekar) required a parallel evolution in design, moving away from stylized, static presentations toward nuanced, atmospheric, and technically advanced audio-visual, and even, at times, and minimalistic, sound design. In conclusion, lighting and music in Marathi theatre have transitioned from being utilitarian components to essential aesthetic tools that define the "total theatre" experience.

Keywords: Marathi Theatre, Sangeet Natak, Stage Lighting, Sound Design, Natyasangeet, Technical Evolution, Scenography.

Introduction:

Marathi theatre is a powerful and artistic medium of expression within the Indian theatrical tradition. In this vibrant art form, all elements—words, acting, dialogue, direction, set design, lighting, music, and sound—interact subtly with one another. A play is not merely a medium for storytelling, but a composite art form encompassing visual, auditory, and emotional experiences. Therefore, lighting and music composition acquire special significance. When we watch a play, we realize that the actor brings the character to life on stage, and the director breathes life into those characters; but the elements that make this portrayal even more effective are lighting and music. Without these, the expression of the stage remains incomplete. Light is not merely illumination, but the emotional world created through that light; and music is not just a collection of notes, but a rhythmic expansion of the atmosphere, time, mental state, and emotions within the play. The development of Marathi theatre began in the latter half of the 19th century and reached its peak of maturity in the 20th century.

Playwrights like Vishnudas Bhave, Annasaheb Kirloskar, Gadkari, and Khadilkar presented many mythological, historical, and musical plays on the Marathi stage. But this was the early period of Marathi theatre. Initially, stage lighting and music were used in a limited capacity. However, with time, new ideas in theatrical direction, technological advancements, and evolving audience sensibilities led to a more nuanced, effective, and symbolic use of these two elements. On today's modern Marathi stage, light and music are no longer merely supporting elements; they have become central to the emotional world of the play. Therefore, in this short research paper, we will study in detail the importance of lighting and music in Marathi theatre, the reasons for their significance, their necessity on stage, and the modern form of these theatrical techniques.

The Nature and Importance of Lighting:

Stage lighting is the process of providing appropriate lighting effects, color schemes, and emotional impact to the scenes unfolding on stage. Light is the most important element of the "visual language" in a play. Through lighting, the time, place, atmosphere, and emotional state of the play are expressed. Generally, the artistic function of lighting is as follows.

1) Creating Atmosphere: The lighting design in a play serves to create the atmosphere according to the storyline. For example, a night scene, a dawn scene, rainy weather, a battlefield, a prison, etc. Lighting is essential to convey the experience of all these situations to the audience.

2) Creating Emotion: The tension, fear, joy, sorrow, and confusion in a character's inner world are expressed not only through acting but also through variations in lighting. Dim light creates fear and mystery, while bright light signifies joy. In this way, lighting is used to display the emotions in a character's mind.

3) Visual Focus and Directional Assistance:

The lighting designer keeps the audience's attention focused on the right place. Putting a 'spotlight' on a character if they are important, or increasing the intensity of a scene by

keeping the rest of the stage in darkness, etc., are all possible with the help of lighting design. This method assists the director.

4) Symbolic Use: In a play, the actor conveys the author's thoughts to the audience through dialogue. But often, these emotions are conveyed to the audience without words. In this, the symbolic use of lighting becomes important. In modern plays, lighting is used symbolically. For example, blue light represents loneliness, red represents anger or violence, while white light symbolizes peace and truth.

The Development of Lighting Design in Marathi Theatre:

In the early period (19th century), lighting design was very limited. Theatre companies used candles, lanterns, and later, Petromax lamps. In plays like "Sangeet Sharada" or "Sangeet Manapman," light was used merely to illuminate the stage. By the mid-20th century, as theatrical productions became more established, the use of electric lighting increased, and separate "light rooms" were created in theatres. During this period, lighting design acquired its own distinct aesthetic language in the plays of Vijaya Mehta, Jabbar Patel, and Mahesh Elkunchwar. In "Ghashiram Kotwal," lighting was used symbolically and rhythmically. Constantly changing colors, specific beams of light, and the illumination falling on the ensemble cast were all connected to the rhythm of the play.

The Nature and Role of Music Composition:

Music composition in theatre means creating sound effects, background music, and musical arrangements that are appropriate to the plot, scenes, and emotions of the play. Music is the "auditory beauty" of theatrical art. It directly impacts the audience's mind. When considering why music is essential in a play, certain things become particularly evident. These are...

1) Creating an Emotional Atmosphere: Background music enhances the emotional impact of dialogues. Fear, sorrow, suspense, joy – every emotion is deepened by music.

2) Indicating Time and Place: In traditional theatre, the sound of instruments like drums, mridangam, conch shells, or taasha is used to indicate the time of the scene.

3) Symbolic Communication: Music sometimes speaks louder than words. The identity or reappearance of a character in a play is shown through specific sound cues.

4) Maintaining the Pace and Rhythm of Direction: In theatre direction, music is a tool for facilitating transitions between scenes. Pauses between dialogues, entrances and exits, and scene changes are made smoother with music.

This is why music is used in theatre. Furthermore, considering the journey of music composition on the Marathi stage, Marathi theatre itself originated from "musical plays." Annasaheb Kirloskar's plays like "Sangeet Shakuntal," "Sangeet Saubhadra," and "Sangeet Manapman" placed music at the center. During this period, music was the heart of the play. Later, experimental theatre emerged, and in dialogue-centric plays, music moved to the background, but instead of singing, the use of sound effects, music complementing the acting, and modern instrumental arrangements increased. For example, in the play "Ghashiram Kotwal," the musical rhythms of tabla, dholki, cymbals, and folk songs created

energy in the play's tempo. In the play "Mahanirvan" (Mahesh Elkunchwar), the background music created a philosophical atmosphere of death and the journey of the soul. The need for light and music on stage is not merely technical but artistic.

1) Enriching the Theatrical Language: Acting and dialogue are the linguistic level of the stage, while light and music are the emotional and visual levels. Without both, the theatrical experience remains incomplete.

2) Assistance in direction: The director uses these elements to give shape to their vision. The director's ideas reach the audience through the mediums of "light and sound".

3) Impact on the audience's emotions: Light and music are a direct language of emotions. These tools prove effective in increasing the audience's emotional involvement.

4) Compatibility with Technological Advancements: In modern times, theatrical performances have become more attractive and realistic with the help of LEDs, projection, digital sound, and multimedia. Therefore, it can be said that the elements of light and music are essential on the stage.

The Changing Nature of Modern Theatre:

Today's Marathi theatre is leaning towards experimentation. Consequently, revolutionary changes are seen in the use of both lighting and music.

1) Technological Revolution: Digital lighting, LED panels, automated spotlights, and sound design software have made modern theatrical performances more dynamic.

2) Use of Projection and Multimedia: Projection, graphics, and sound effects are used in the visuals to break the boundaries between "reality and symbolism." **3) New Techniques in Music:** Electronic instruments, synthesizers, and recorded background music have made sound production more effective.

4) Experimentation and Symbolism: Modern directors use light and music symbolically. For example, using color shades to indicate the characters' state of mind or showing the absence of music through silence. Examples: "Ghashiram Kotwal" (Jabbar Patel):

Music and lighting became the rhythmic core of the play. Traditional folk music was used with a modern concept. Also, "Mahanirvan" (Mahesh Elkunchwar):

Dim light, cool blue shades, and subtle sounds were used to depict death and philosophy. And "Mrugajal" (Vijaya Mehta):

An experiment was conducted to show the inner conflict of a woman through lighting. On the modern stage, lighting and music composition are not separate departments but have become integral components of the play's narrative process. The coordination between the director, lighting designer, and music composer is the foundation of the beauty of theatrical art. Lighting designers and music composers become co-creators of the director's vision. They have given both soul and form to the visual presentation. Therefore, it can be said that these two elements are not merely "technical assistants" but "creative collaborators."

Conclusion:

Lighting and music design in Marathi theatre are the very language of the dramatic art. The subtle and sensitive use of both in every scene of a play creates an artistic impact. Light is the visual heart of the play, and music is its auditory soul. One creates the emotion,

while the other gives it a voice. A play is a confluence of dialogue, acting, and technical elements; and light and music are the bridge-building components in that confluence. Modern technology has made their expression more subtle, dynamic, and symbolic. Yet, the fundamental objective of both these elements remains the same even today: "to provide the audience with an emotional and artistic experience." Marathi theatre has achieved a beautiful blend of artistry, technicality, and emotionality through these two elements. Therefore, lighting and music design will remain an essential and vibrant part of dramatic art on the stage of today and tomorrow.

References:

Yashwant Kelkar - Natyanirmiti (Theatre Production), Kailas Publication, Aurangabad.

Prof. Datta Bhagat - Marathi Rangbhumichi Vatachal (The Journey of Marathi Theatre), Maharashtra State Literature and Culture Board, Mumbai.

Dr. Ramesh Jadhav - Rangtantra (Theatre Techniques), Lekhani Publication, Pune.

Dr. Rustum Achalkhamb - Marathi Rangbhumiche Prarambhaparva (The Early Period of Marathi Theatre), Varsha Publication, Aurangabad.