

## **Buddhism: The doctrine of impermanance**

The doctrine of dependent origination also yields the Buddhist theory of the transitory nature of things. All things, Buddha repeatedly teaches, are subject to change and decay. As everything originates from some condition, it disappears when the condition ceases to be. Whatever has a beginning has also an end. Buddha, therefore, says, 'know that whatever exists arises from causes and conditions and is in every respect impermanent. That which seems everlasting will perish, that which is high will be laid low; where meeting is, parting will be; where birth is, death will come. Transitoriness of life and wordly things is spoken of by many other poets and philosophers.

Buddha logically perfects this view into the doctrine of impermanence. His later followers develop this further into a theory of momentariness (*kṣaṇika-vāda*), which means not only that everything has conditional and, therefore, non-permanent existence, but also that things last not even for short periods of time, but exist for one partless moment only. This doctrine of momentariness of all things is supported by later writers with elaborate arguments, one of which may be briefly noticed here: the criterion of the existence (*sattā*) of a thing is its capacity to produce some effect ('*arthakriyākāritva-lakṣaṇam sat*).

A nonexistent thing, like a hare's horn, cannot produce any effect. Now, from this criterion of existence, it may be deduced that a thing having existence must be momentary. If, for example, a thing like a seed be not accepted to be momentary, but thought to be lasting for more than one moment, then we have to show that it is capable of producing an effect during each moment it exists. Again, if it really remains the same unchanging thing during these moments, then it should be able to produce the same effect at every one of those moments. But we find that this is not the case. The seed in the house does not produce the seedling which is generated by a seed sown in the field. The seed in the house cannot then be the same as that in the field. But it may be said that though the seed does not actually produce the same effect always, it always has the potentiality to produce the same effect always, it always has the potentiality to produce it, and this potentiality becomes kinetic in the presence of suitable auxiliary conditions like earth, water, etc. Therefore, the seed is always the same.

But this defence is weak; because then it is virtually confessed that the seed of the first moment is not the cause of the seedling, but that the seed modified by the other conditions really causes the effect. Hence the seed must be admitted to have changed. In this way it may be shown regarding everything that it does not stay unchanged during any two moments, because it does not produce the identical effect during both moments. Hence everything lasts only for a moment.