

# Buddhist Theory of Pratyaksa (Direct Cognition)

## With Special Reference to Dignaga and Dharmakirti



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## ABSTRACT

All cognition begins with sensation. Senses of human beings are the first source of cognition, because we come into contact with objects via our senses. There are various views regarding “pratyaksa” in different philosophical traditions. According to Dignaga and Dharmakirti the Buddhist theory of pratyaksa gives us the ultimate true cognition and is the collision of three things i.e. sense-moment, consciousness-moment and an object moments, it is not associated with mental construction (Kalpana). Naiyayika theory of two stages of pratyaksa i.e. nirvikalpaka pratyaksa (undeterminate cognition) and sarvikalpaka pratyaksa (determinate cognition). The first is the cognition of an object with name, quality etc.

Pratyaksa has been divided into four kinds according to its sources by Dignaga and Dharmakirti namely:

1. Indriya pratyaksa (direct sensory cognition)
2. Manasa pratyaksa (direct mental cognition).
3. Svasamvedana (self consciousness).
4. Yogi Pratyaksa (yogic consciousness)

From the above four kinds of pratyaksa we find that theory of pratyaksa, for Dignaga and Dharmakirti, is not confined to indriya pratyaksa (direct sensory cognition) alone, but it is used in a wide sense including the experiences of saints

*Keywords:* Pratyaksa, Manasa, Svasamvedana, Yogi Pratyaksa

## Introduction

All cognition begins with sensation. Senses of human beings are the first source of cognition, because we come into contact with objects via our senses. There are various views regarding “pratyakṣa” in different philosophical traditions. According to Dignaga and Dharmakirti the Buddhist theory of pratyakṣa gives us the ultimate true cognition and is the collision of three things i.e. sense-moment, consciousness-moment and an object moments, it is not associated with mental construction (Kalpana). Naiyayika theory of two stages of pratyakṣa i.e. nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa (undeterminate cognition) and sarvikalpaka pratyakṣa (determinate cognition). The first is the cognition of an object with name, quality etc.

In classical Indian philosophy, the term “pratyakṣa” refers to the first source of cognition (Jnanam) and has been translated into English as direct-cognition, direct-perception, sense-perception, sensation, immediate perception by different commentators. For Dignaga and Dharmakirti, it directly cognizes the real nature of an object (svalaksana). For Buddhist, pratyakṣa also means the first source of cognition (pramana). In Buddhist philosophy the term “vinnana” has been translated into English as “consciousness”, “cognition” and “knowledge” and the term “jnana” as “cognition” and “knowledge”. Sometimes the term “consciousness” has been used to refer to “citta” and “vijnana” etc. These variations in translation create a lot of confusion. To void this confusion we intend to use Pali and Sanskrit terms and give their English equivalents in brackets.

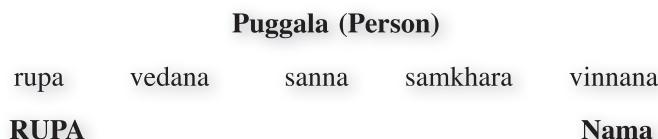
The concept “pratyakṣa” has been defined in various ways in schools of Indian philosophy between 400-1200 A.D. P. Ratyaks in Nyayasutra of Gautama has been defined as that cognition produced by the contact of sense and object is ayapadesyam (inexpressible), avyabhicarin (non-erroneous) and vyavasayatmakum (determinate).

Pratyakṣa, according to Vaisesikas, is cognition produced by the contact of the soul (atman) the sense (indriya), the mind (manasa) and (artha).

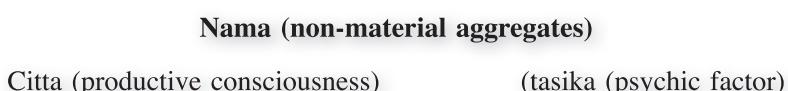
According to the Samkhayas, the function of the auditory, tactal, visual, gustatory and alfactory senses which is controlled by the mind and which operates in order to obtain an apprehension of sounds, tactal objects, colours, tastes and smell, collaborates in the formation of pratyakṣa.

There is no systematic theory of pratyakṣa in early Buddhism. A reason may be considered that early Buddhist did not require a separate treatise apart from Tripitaka. The separate treatise of Nyaya (logic) was not needed, because Tripitaka facilitates the logical understanding of truth. However in early Buddhism the concept of pratyakṣa is in form of phassa (contact).

As the Buddhist's rejection of the self the person (puggala) consists of five aggregates viz. rupa (corporeality), vedana (feeling), sanna (ideation), samkhara (mental formation), vedana (consciousness). These five aggregates can be divided into two main groups, namely the material and the non-material group. The aggregate of corporality (rupa) belongs to the material group called "rupa". The remaining aggregates i.e. vedan (feeling) anna (ideation), samkhara (mental formation) (andvinnana (consciousness) belong to the non-material group called "nama". The term 'nama' was used to refer to all mental phenomena Buddhaghosa writes in his (Visutimagga) "Thus the aggregate of corporeality is rupa (form). The four non-material aggregates are nama (name) (Visutthimarga XVIII. 590).1 Nama and rupa taken together constitutes the psycho-physical complex known as puggala (person). Thus we can draw the diagram of five aggregates as: -



In the Abhidhamma the term "nama" is extended to include not only the four (non-material aggregates but also Nirvana. ( Vibhaga-Atthakatha. 405. Here "Nama" (non-material aggregates) are considered under two terms, namely, "citta" (productive consciousness) and "Cetasika" (psychic factor). The term "citta" is said to be a synonym for two other terms, namely "Vinnana" (consciousness) and "Mama" (mind) and the term "etasika" is referred to the remaining non-material aggregates i.e. Vedana (feeling) anna (ideation) and samkhara (mental formation). This process can be explained through the diagram:-



The aggregates of vedana (feeling) sanna (ideation) and samkhara (mental formations) are called (etasika) (psychic factors) because they are associated with citta (productive consciousness).

In Abhidhammatthasangha, Anuruddha has given a clear and precise definition of cetasika (psychic factors).:-

“Cetasika (psychic factors) are those that arise and perish together with citta (productive consciousness) they are associate with citta and share the same object and basis with citta”( Abhidhammathasangaha II, I. These psychic factors are 52 in number and always accompany citta. Thus citta (productive consciousness) does not arise in isolation, it always arise together with a number of cetasika (psychic factors). Citta and cetasika (psychic factors), though eternal to one another in analysis, are in reality intimately and inseparably connected with one another. Citta and cetasika are related to one another by way of association (sampayuttapaccaya). Hence citta is its purest form does not function in isolation and separation, it is always accompanied by some cetasika (psychic factors). This means that citta inspite of being egoless, is not content less, because it has cetasika (psychic factors) a contents, so far as citta contains something, it cannot be regarded a nothingless. Citta is defined as intentionality, mean that citta is productive consciousness of an object (arammanam cinc etiti cittam) According to the Buddhists, citta is the state of perpetual flux. It can never remain the same for any two consecutive moments. Each moment of citta is extremely short. The Buddha says in Anguttara- Nikaya:- “ I consider, monks that there is no phenomenon that comes and goes so quickly a citta. It is not easy to find a simile to show quickly citta comes and goes”(Angutta-Nikaya I,10).

In Dhiga- Nikaya it is stated that moments of citta, short lived as they are, succeed one another rapidly so that they appear to be the stream of citta (Dhiga-Nikaya III, 105). Regarding the term ‘citta’ and “vinnana”, here some confusion may arise in us, because sometimes the term “consciousness” refers to “citta” and sometimes “vinnana”. However it should be noted here that the term “citta” refers to process of consciousness associated with papancadhamma (productive mind). It begins when the process of vedana (feeling) begins to operate. The term “vinnana” (consciousness) refers to the process of consciousness arisen from phassa (contact i.e., contact of an object senses and consciousness) which yields cognition of the real nature of an object and vinnana also operates in any cognitive process, because vinnana means “cognition of an object and of self (svasamvade-dana)”. However vinnana of other cognition apart from that of phassa or pratyaksa is not vinnana of real nature of object (svalaksana).

In Abhidhammathasamgaha moments of consciousness (vinnana) have been compared to the perpetual flow of the current of a river.(Abhidhammathasangaha V. 15). We see a river as the same river but in fact there is not a drop of water as we have seen,

because the river perpetually flows. Water that we see at the first moment is not the same at second. Many drops of water form the successive streams of water to be river.

Rupa (corporeality or form) in Buddhism is not defined as the extended thing but as “the changeable thing.” It is impermanent, arises and perishes each moment ,it is momentary (Khanika).however, rupa appears as relatively permanent due to the meaning –giving activity of citta. We should note here that the arising and perishing of citta (productive consciousness) and rupa (corporeality) are not condition less. They arise and perish according to the law of conditionality. According to Buddha, all phenomena are subject to the law of conditionality (paticcasamupada). All elements though appear only for single moment are dependently originating element, because they depend for their arising on what have gone before them. The law of conditionality (paticcasamuppata) can be expressed by the following formula a mentioned in Majjima-nikaya:-

“When this is, that is (lmasamim sati, idam hot)  
 This arising , that arises (imussuppada idam uppajjati)  
 When this is not, that is not (imassamim asati, idam na hoti)  
 This ceasing, that cease (imassa niradha idam nirujjaii) (Majjhima-Nikaya III 3.S.XII.21).

According to early Buddhism, vinnana (consciousness) in regarding to phassa (contact) is defined as that consciousness is consciousness of an object. Consciousness cannot arise without an object to be “hung upon”. Hence an object is a necessary condition of arising of consciousness of an object. Since vinnana (consciousness) is born supported or conditioned by an object, consciousness is consciousness of an object , then the relation between subject and object is called phassa (contact).vinnana (consciousness) is related to its object with the help of six sense organs i.e. eye, ear. nose, tongue, body, and mind. To elaborate this view let us take an example from Milindapanha:-

“Whatever one sees through his eyes, hears through his ears, smells through his nose, touches through his body, cognizes through his mind, all thes he knows by his vinnana (consciousness).

Thus the triad of vinnana (consciousness) sense organ and an object is accepted in early Buddhism as mentioned in Majjhima- nikaya., the coming together of the three is contact (phassa). In majjhima- Nikaya of Suttantapitaka, it runs as follows:-

“Being conditioned by eye and object, arises eye- consciousness, the collision of three things (senses, consciousness an an object) is called phassa (contact). Being conditioned by phassa (contact) arises vñana (feeling), whaever is felt is knwn (cakkhunc paticca rupa ca upajjati cakkhuvinnanam, tinnam samgatti phassa, phassa paccaya vñana yam,vede it tam samjanatti)” (Majjhima-Nikaya III. 112.).

Here we find that phassa (contact) is similar to pratyaksa (direct cognition) of Dignaga and Dharamakirti, because it is born of a mere contct of the three viz. the sense organ, an object and consciousness. Again, according to majjima-Nikaya, an object of our snsory contact (phassa) or (patigha- samphassa are momentary and non-substantial, but their true nature I distorted when they are conceptualized by out citta (productive consciousness) influenced by raga (lust), dos (hatred), nd moha (delusion). Majjhima-Nikaya. I. 298. Citta which is influenced by lust, hatred and delusion etc. conceptualizes nd constituts the phenomenal world . The process of citta which constitutes the world has been described in theMadupindika- sutta as follows;—

“Whatever man perceivs (sanjanati) he conceives (vitakketi).

Whatever he conceives that he differentiates (papanc-etti): and when he differentiates by reason thereof ideas and considerations of differentiation (papanca-sanna-samkhara0 arise in him”.

Here the term “sanjanatti means “intentionally Cognize”, it is cognition or consciousness of the pure actual nature of an object.

The process of contact of ayatana (sense faculty), aammana (an object) and vinnana (consciousness) is “phassa”. It is pure vinnana (consciousness) because it is the process of cognition of pure nature of an object without cooperation with intellectual mind. It is the origin and development of he theory of pratyaksa of Dignaga and Dharamakirti. At the end of the process of phassa, the process of cognition of conventional world i.e. the process of vedanna (feeling) and sanna etc. begins to operate (according to dignaga it I inferential or indirect cognition),, because it operates with the process of intellectual mind. From te processof vana (feeling), sanna (ideation), vitakka (conceiving),and ppancasann (differentiation) there is arising of vinnana also, but it is not vinnna of the pure nature of an object as vinnana arisen from phassa. It is vinnana or cognition of an object cooperated with intellectual mind.

In Abhidhammapitaka, we find the term "phassa" means discriminative and unselective activity of mind. We can call it pratyaksa as it is more cognition of presence of real nature of an object without cognition of its name, genus, quality, etc. In Vibhanga atthakatha phassa is compared to a sound produced by the beating of a drum with a stick, here drum stands for the eyes and the stick for the object of sight. Another simile is an image of an object with consciousness and senses devoid of any process of intellectual mind.

Again according to the Suttantapitak, Vinnana (consciousness) means only sense impression devoid of all imagination which comes into operation after sense impression (cakkhuvinnanam panettha dassanamattm eva hoti, sota vinnanadini Ghana savana phusanmatana eva panca vinnana e hi na kanc I dhamam pativijdnati) Vibhanga-Atthakatha 405. This sense impression (phassa) is held to be pratyaksa by Dignaga and Dharamakirti.

The concept of phassa is the conception of pratyaksa according to Dignaga and Dharamakirti. Phassa by meaning is the process that can inform the life process through the contact or convergence of three groups of factors. (1) The internal sense-bases (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind). (11) The external sense -bases (form, sound, smell, taste, tangible objects (phottabba) and intangible mind-object). And (iii) consciousness (eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness). This process takes place whenever a person becomes aware of something. Another meaning of phassa is the linking of consciousness or vinnana with the external world perceiving mind-objects or various experiences. Phassa arises when the six senses carry out their function. Phassa by meaning of sensations take place through the meeting of three constituents, namely internal senses through any of the following eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, external senses objects (arummana) through any of the following- forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects or mind-objects and consciousness (vinnana) through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind. Sensations occur through this link with the senses. Then after phassa (contact) having arisen via those processes stated above vedana (feeling) of sukha (happy) or dukkha (suffering) occurs. One of the following three responses arises:- comfort and absorption as such-vedna discomfort and pain as dukkha, (dukkha-vedana), or else equanimity or neither-sukha-nor dukha (pekkha or adukkhamasukha v edana).

Though the Buddhists before Dignaga supposed all vinnana (consciousness) having arisen from phassa to be devoid of all elements of ideation or thoughts, they did not yet explicate these ideas, until Dignaga and Dharamakirti developed them. With the help

of these concepts Dignaga and Dharamakirti developed the theory of pratyaksa (direct cognition) with the force of logic and epistemology. The reason of this development is that since during that time many schools of Indian philosophy had established their own theory of logic and epistemology. The theory of Pramana-sasatra played its dominant role in most schools. Dignaga and Dharamakirti also developed the Buddhist theory of cognition. The success of human aims is prodded by right cognition which is twofold Pratyaksa (direct cognition) and anumana (inference or indirect cognition) (dvidham samyagmamam pratyaksam anumanam ca) pratyaksa (direct cognition) yields the cognition of the real nature of the object whereas anumana yields the cognition of conventional world.

According to Buddhism, all things are impermanent and unsubstantial. They are always changeable and in the state of perpetual flux, arise, develop and perish every moment. The perishing of the elements in the next moment. All elements are in the state of momentariness. Regarding the theory of pratyaksa, the Buddhists believe that vinnana or vijnana (consciousness) and aramman (an object) are in the state of perpetual flow. One may wonder about the possibility of pratyaksa when both the object and consciousness are in perpetual flux. According to Dignaga and Dharamkirti, pratyaksa arises when object-moment and consciousness-moment are contemporaneous. That is, they flash together simultaneously. Pratyaksa is held to be caused by a contact (sparash) among object-moment, the sense-moment and consciousness-moment. These three are in momentary state so they are in contact (sparsa) among object-moment, the sense-moment and consciousness moment. Further to clarify this point C.S. Vyas in his work Buddhist theory of perception writes:-

“S” Supposes that the subject-moment are the never ending flow of a river and the consciousness-moment are the drop of ceaseless rain, such that each falling rain-drop meets a distinct drop of water belonging to the cognitive state in pratyaksa. The rain drop and the flowing drop are both necessary for the meeting at the self-same moment.” Pratyaksa, according to these two thinkers, is the cognition devoid of all images and illusions. The first moment of the contact between conscious sense faculty (dyatana) and object is called pratyaksa. A moment of form (rupa), a moment of sense of vision (caksu) and a moment of vijnana (consciousness) arising simultaneously in close contiguity, constitute what is called caksuvinnana (consciousness of form). Vinnana (consciousness) never appears alone, but is always supported by an object (visaya or drambana) and receptive faculty (ingriya). Pratyaksa is a cognition of an object, not of other than this.

According to the Buddhists, what we hold as substance, quality etc is a production of our mental construction (kalpana) which is explained with the term “ papanca” by Buddha in Samyutta- nikaya as-

“ Human beings are possessed by obsession of papanca, being conscious of external objects, they approach things with imagination (papanca) piercing all that is mind made”

In conventional world, human cognition is mixed with conventional idea or mental construction. The conventional cognition is the cognition of human thoughts mixed with particular object or only human idea. Therefore right cognition, in ultimate sense, is that the cognition does not mix with any element of ideation of human beings, cognition arisen from pratyaksa (direct cognition) only. However, we should carefully understand that Dignaga and Dharamakiriti did not deny the conventional cognition, but they distinguished between cognition of ultimate reality (paramartha) and conventional cognition of traditional reality. (samvrat). The reason of the distinction pof these two is that svalaksana or paramartha can be grasped through the capacity of pratyaksa (sensation or direct cognition) only. Sense-faculties only grasp svalaksana, could not give any ideation to svalaksana. It is just the contact of conscious sense –faculties with its own nature of the object (it means to grasp the object as “it is”, not ‘as’). The ideation can be given to an object only by intellectual mind, and then samvrat or samanyalaksana which is common character of an object such as name, genus, quality, action, and substance, is the productive activity of human mind could not be grasped by pratyaksa, but by anumana (indirect cognition or inference) of productive imagination of human mind, could not be grasped by pratyaksa, but by anumana (indirect cognition or inference of productive imagination of human mind only. Therefore Dignaga formulated ,in accordance with these two objects i.e., ultimate reality (paramartha or svalaksana) nd conventional reality or samanyalaksana), the theory of Pramanavyavastha (theory oftwo means of cognition) in his magnum opus Pramanasamuccaya. The first means of cognition paraman) is pratyaksa (direct cognition0 and the second s anumana (indirect cognition). There are trictly speaking only two means of cognition as stated above:

According to Dignag , pratyaksa is a cognition which occurs in close connection ith (prati0 each sense faculty (aksa). The theory of pratyaksa is the theory of cognition arisen from direct cognition of ultimate reality of the external world as cognized by human beings. In contact of senses, consciousness and object. It I the theory of acceptance of the

external world beside consciousness. This is the evidence to prove that Dignaga is not an Idealist or Vijnanavadin as characterized by some scholars.

Anumana (indirect cognition) according to Dignag and Dharamakiriti, ha it province from immediately finishing of the process of pratyaksa. All correct concepts derived from the actual cognition of the real nature of an object (svalaksna) are not from anything else. The mind can only be a source f valid cognition for others if it apprehends and conceptualizes really perceived and existent particular object. Memory and imagination are not pratyaksa because they were already in mind, they are not fresh and are products of mental construction, therefore they are anumana. In short, it means that once direct cognition9 pratyaksa0 was associated with human mental construction (kalpana), then inferential or indirect cognition arises. In our experience, we cognize external object and understand it. The process of pratyajsa is extremely short. The succeeding process is of anuman , it takes more time than that of pratyaksa . In pratyaksa, direct sensory cognition of an object. (svalaksana), is the cognition (jnanam) of the pure nature of an object, not mixed with any ideation. But anumana is the cognition of an object mixed with ideation, it is the world of conventional communication, therefore it is called ‘indirect cognition’. An object of pratyaksa is different from an object of anumana, which is cognized by pratyaksa can never be recognized by anumana can never be cognized by pratyaksa. Cognition either is direct or indirect, pratyaksa (direct cognition) or anumana (indirect cognition). There are no other kinds of cognition.

Dignaga has defined pratyaksa as cognition which is free from conceptualization (Kalpanapadham0. I this definition the term “kalpana/ means cognition consisting in associating immediate awareness wth word which can be classified into five categories i.e.(10 name 9nama) 92) genus (jati) 93) quality (guna) (4) action (5) substance(dravya). Dignaga’s explanation of these five categories in his pramana=samuccaya runs as;-

“In the case of arbitrary words or proper-names (yadrccha sabda0, a thing (artha) distinguished by a name is expressed bya word such as “dittha” (bullock”. In the case of genus-words of common names (jatisadha), thing distinguished by a genus is expressed by word such as “go’ (cow). In the case of quality is expressed by a word such as “sukla”. In case of action --words or verbal nouns (kriya sabda0 thing distinguished by action is expressed by a word such as paaka (a cook, to cook). In case of substance-words (dravya sabda) a thing distinguished by a substance is expressed by a word such as ‘dandia) (a stuff-bearer) or visanin (horned, a horn bearer)”

Therefore according to Dignaga, kalpna is the process of associating those five categories with a thing. Pratyaksa must not be associated with this mental construction (kalpana).

Dharamakiriti has defined pratyaksa as cognition which is free from mental construction and is non-erroneous(kalpanapodham abhrantam pratyaksam). He defined as his master (Dignaga defined, but added the qualification “non-erroneous” (abhrantam0, Kalpana (mental construction0 has been defined by Dharamakiriti in his Nyayabindu as that mental act which associates an object with a verbal cognition. It is devoid of real object (svalaksana) and is always followed by word. Kalpana is imagination consisting of joining name and class of things (etc. Here the term “kalpana” is as the same as the term ‘papanca’ in early Buddhism, because both refer to the process of mental construction associate with ignorance (avijja) and mental formations (samkhara) etc. They distort the cognition arisen from pratyaksa of human beings by conceptualizing it, because conceptualization is the process of anumana.

According to Dignaga and Dharamakiriti, language is mental construction. The svalaksama (real nature of an object) is inexpressible. To construct name and word is the function of intellectual mind. Senses could not do like that Name are created by intellectual mind after finishing of the process of pratyaksa. An external object reflects sense-consciousness alone. Sense-consciousness does not contain a name or word, it is not capable of giving a name to an object. Therefore “name” or “language” is a mere label given to an object by human intellectual mind according to previous experience in the society. The problem or example may arise in the case of some person who lives with elephant in forest since he was innocent, he has no previous experience in society. How can he deal with the external world? The reply is that he may see what we called tiger as he saw and called it as he can call. But his first moment of perceiving of that object is pratyaksa, because he perceives it as “it is” (svalaksana0, not as “tiger”. He just sees that object but does not even think “it is as”. This is pratyaksa, then in succeeding moments he may call it by name or may not know what it is as we know, but he knows it by his own mind, because he has no conventional knowledge of the name of tiger. However the process of mental construction operates, it is anumana.

Pratyaksa for Dharamakiriti, must be free from illusion (abhrantam) also. He means sensory illusion, because pratyaksa is direct sensory cognition of the real nature of an object, therefore it must be free from sensorial illusion. He does not mean mental illusion as an illusion of a person perceiving a rope as a snake. He says in Nyayabindu “sensory right cognition

(pratyaksa) is devoid of any illusion produced by color blindness, rapid motion, sickness or other causes. All these instances of illusion are located in sense organs. They have nothing to do with the intellectual mind. Color blindness is an eye defect--man sees everything yellow because of his eye defect. The mental illusion has been included in term "kalpana", because it is mental illusion located in human mind which is the field of anumana.

## Conclusion

According to Dignaga and Dharmakirti, in the process of cognition while consciousness cognizes an object, at the same time, it cognizes itself. This is the doctrine of svaprakasa (self luminous nature of cognition) which is the basic tenet of the Buddhist epistemology. Cognition of the cognition is fact in our experience. When man has cognition of something blue, he has at the same time, the awareness of the cognition of something blue. At every moment of cognition's cognizing an object, it cognizes itself while illuminating the object.

Pratyaksa has been divided into four kinds according to its sources by Dignaga and Dharmakirti namely:

5. Indriya pratyaksa (direct sensory cognition)
6. Manasa pratyaksa (direct mental cognition).
7. Svasamvedana (self consciousness).
8. Yogipratyaksa (yogic consciousness)

From the above four kinds of pratyaksa we find that theory of pratyaksa, for Dignaga and Dharmakirti, is not confined to indriyapratyaksa (direct sensory cognition) alone, but it is used in a wide sense including the experience of saints

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