

There are 130 settlements and communities located in different parts of India, Nepal and Bhutan, in addition to the groups in the West. The livelihood of many Tibetans are dependent on farming an acre of dry land provided by the government of India. With the increase in population and for want of better sustenance, many Tibetans engage in seasonal business moving to cities for a part of the year, as a result of which many scattered communities have sprouted. The resettlement projects in Canada, Switzerland and US, spurred movement of many Tibetans to Western countries seeking a better livelihood. Today among the hundred and forty odd thousand Tibetans, about 1,25,000 live across the length and breadth of India, Nepal and Bhutan, and the rest in the western world.

The largest concentration of Tibetans outside Tibet is in South India. A settlement officer usually appointed by the Government-in-exile, administers each of the settlements. Some of the settlements have elected administrators and efforts are on to urge the public to elect their own administrators. 37 out of the 47 larger settlements have elected local assemblies. The local administration is accountable to the local assembly and the local assembly to the people. A settlement constitutes a cluster of camps or villages. Each village in the cluster elects a camp leader who keeps in touch with the Settlement Officers, thus forming the base of the democratic pyramid.

The bigger settlements have cooperative societies to assist them economically. The people elect their representatives to the cooperative society Board of Directors, members of Tibetan Freedom Movement, members of the Local Assembly and takes part in the election of the members of ATPD and Kalon Tripa.

The elections to ATPD or Kalon Tripa are held in one day all over the world. The far flung locations of the settlements, in some cases, without basic communication facilities, make the whole election process a daunting task to ensure maximum participation. In times of elections of ATPD members and Kalon Tripa, two Election Commissioners are appointed to assist the fulltime Chief Election Commissioner. Members of the Local Election Committee are elected by the people and the Returning officers and the election staffs are appointed by the Chief Election Commissioner.

The number of members of ATPD varied from 12 to 17 till the 11th Assembly. During those days, the Election Commission was formed for that particular election and for that particular period. The tenure of ATPD also varied from one to five years, though the term was set for three years till it was extended to 5 years in 1985.

After the changes made in 1990, the number of members increased to 46 with 10 deputies each from each of the three Cholkas (traditional provinces of Tibet) of U-Tsang, Dhotoe and Dhomey; two each from each of the four principal Buddhist traditions and the pre-Buddhist Bon faith of Tibet, irrespective of the number of the electorates. Two deputies were elected from Tibetan communities in Europe and one from North America. One to three eminent Tibetans were nominated by the Dalai Lama. Since the community-in-exile has no political parties, candidates for the elections, overseen by the Tibetan Election Commission, are put forward by their constituencies somewhat along the lines of the American primaries. Candidates of not less than double the members to be elected in sequence of the number of votes obtained are eligible to

enter the final contest for an Assembly seat.