The census classification of urban settlements is metropolitan, or million plus, class-I ranging from 1 lakh to 10 lakhs, class-II ranging from 50,000 to 1 lakh, class-III from 20,000 to 50,000, class-IV from 10,000 to 20,000, class-V from 5,000 to 10,000 and class-VI from 3,000 to 5,000. The 53 metropolitan cities contain 19.24 percent of the total urban population of India. However, as a proportion of the entire population of India the 53 metropolitan cities account for just 6 percent of the total population. Therefore, in the total settlement pattern of India the metropolitan cities still only represent a very small proportion. In this behalf there is not much change between what prevailed in 1981 and what we find today.

There is another factor which we must take into account when we look at the share of urban population in the total population. About 7.5 percent of the urban population lives in towns ranging from class-VI to class-IV, that is, from 3000 to 20,000 population which represents about 2.5 percent of the total population. When we deduct this from the total urban population, which is necessary because most of these towns are either linked with agriculture directly or provide marketing and other services to an agricultural hinterland which makes them more rural in character than urban, then the picture alters further. If we take their population into account and deduct it from the total urban population because even today such towns are semirural or semi-urban, then even today the actual urban population is only about 28 percent of the total population. At the macro level, therefore, one could safely state that India’s population is well distributed in a hierarchy of settlements ranging from the smallest hamlet and village right up to mega metropolitan cities such as Delhi and Bombay.
I - Population Distribution as per Census of India, 2011

- RURAL: 68.8%
- URBAN: 31.2%
II - Distribution between Categories of Urban Settlements

- Class II, III: 74.3%
- Metropolitan: 18.2%
- Class IV, V, VI: 7.5%
Metropolitan to Class III, 28.7%

Class IV, V, VI 2.5%

Rural, 68.8%