



Original Research Article

UPDATED BRAHM GOVIND (B.G.) PRASAD'S SOCIOECONOMIC CLASSIFICATION FOR THE YEAR 2026: AN INCOME-BASED SCALE USING CPI IW LINKED TO 2016 BASE AND RECENT INFLATION TRENDS IN INDIA

M Nagarjuna¹, Anjan Kumar Karri², Visweswara Rao Guthi³, Ajeetha B⁴, Priadarsine M M⁵, Balajee G Bandi⁶, Mandam Vamsi Priya⁷, Gudimallam Sai Manasa⁸

^{1,2}Senior Resident, Department of Community Medicine, Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati, India.

³Associate professor, Department of Community Medicine, Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati, India.

^{4,5,6}Junior Resident, Department of Community Medicine, Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati, India.

^{7,8}Intern, Department of Community Medicine, Sri Venkateswara Institute of Medical Sciences, Tirupati, India.

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Corresponding Author:

Dr. Visweswara Rao Guthi,
Associate professor, Department of
Community Medicine, Sri
Venkateswara Institute of Medical
Sciences, Tirupati, India.
Email: vissumbbs@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Background: Socioeconomic status (SES) is a key determinant of health, influencing disease risk, health-care access, and overall well-being in the Indian population. Periodic, inflation-adjusted updates of income-based SES scales are essential to maintain their validity in research and programme planning. The Brahm Govind (B. G.) Prasad classification is one of the most commonly used per-capita income-based tools in both urban and rural settings, and requires regular revision using Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) data.

Materials and Methods: The updated B. G. Prasad socioeconomic classification for 2026 was derived from the original 1961 income slabs by applying standard linking factors for 1982, 2001, and 2016, together with the most recent CPI-IW values available for late 2025, to compute a correction factor and recalculate per-capita monthly income cut-offs for all five classes.

Results: The revised 2026 income thresholds show a further upward shift in class limits over 2025, consistent with post-2016 inflation trends, and demonstrate widening gaps between upper and lower classes that mirror the rising cost of living and progressive income stratification in India.

Conclusions: Regular CPI-IW-based revisions of the B. G. Prasad scale, including the present 2026 update, help preserve its relevance for SES assessment in epidemiological studies and public-health planning, though complementary multidimensional measures remain necessary to capture socioeconomic inequalities fully.

Keywords: Socioeconomic status, Updated B. G. Prasad classification 2026, Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers, inflation, per-capita income, India, social class.

INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a fundamental determinant of health, shaping access to healthcare, nutrition, education, and overall well-being for individuals and families. It serves as a key indicator in epidemiological research, helping to identify health disparities, stratify risk, and guide the formulation of public health policies and targeted

interventions.¹ In the Indian context, where marked economic² and social heterogeneity exists across regions and population groups, robust and up-to-date SES measurement tools are essential for accurately capturing socioeconomic gradients and their relationship with health outcomes.

Among the various SES classification systems used in India, the modified B. G. Prasad scale and the modified Kuppaswamy scale are the most widely

applied. The B. G. Prasad scale, first introduced in 1961, is based solely on per capita monthly income and has the advantage of being applicable in both urban and rural settings. Its simplicity and wide acceptability have made it a standard tool in community-based and hospital-based studies. However, because the scale is income-based, it is highly sensitive to inflation and shifts in the cost of living.³⁻⁵ To preserve its relevance, the income cut-offs for each social class must be periodically revised using the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI IW), which measures changes in the prices of a defined basket of essential goods and services consumed by industrial workers. CPI IW is compiled and published monthly by the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, and is regarded as the standard reference index for updating income thresholds in the B. G. Prasad classification.²

CPI IW is widely considered the most appropriate index for adjusting income ranges so that the scale reflects contemporary purchasing power and living costs. Because SES plays a central role in health planning, programme evaluation, and policy formulation, the modified B. G. Prasad scale must be periodically recalibrated to mirror current economic conditions.⁶ Building on this need, the present article focuses on updating the modified B. G. Prasad scale for 2026 using the latest CPI IW series with the 2016 base year, while situating this update within the broader framework of SES measurement and its implications for contemporary public health research and practice in India.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The B. G. Prasad scale classifies socioeconomic status (SES) solely based on per capita monthly income and is widely used in epidemiological research and community health assessments in both rural and urban settings. Its simplicity, reliance on a single income variable, and long history of use have made it a standard tool in studies examining healthcare access, socioeconomic inequalities, and disease burden.^{2,7} Since its introduction in 1961, the scale has undergone repeated revisions to adjust for inflation and changing price levels, using the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW)² as the reference index for income recalibration.

Calculation of the modified B. G. Prasad scale (2026)

For the present update, the B. G. Prasad scale continues to classify SES into five classes (Class I: highest to Class V: lowest) based on per capita monthly income. The original 1961 income ranges were first converted to 2016-base values using previously established methods and linking factors, and the 2026 update was then derived from these 2016 ranges using the latest CPI-IW. In line with contemporary practice, the cumulative change in CPI-IW from the 2016 base year was used, rather than stepwise recalculation from 1961 for each revision.

The updated income thresholds for 2026 were obtained by applying a correction (multiplication) factor to the 2016 per capita income ranges.

STEPS FOR THE UPDATE OF THE CLASSIFICATION

Step 1: Understanding the Base Values The original B.G. Prasad Scale (1961) was based on per capita monthly income (in INR).

Table 1: Original B. G. Prasad socioeconomic classification (1961) based on per capita monthly income (INR)

Class	Description	Income range (1961) (INR per capita/month)
Class I (Upper)	Upper	≥ 100
Class II (Upper middle)	Upper middle	50 – 99
Class III (Middle)	Middle	30 – 49
Class IV (Lower middle)	Lower middle	15 – 29
Class V (Lower)	Lower	< 15

Step 2: Identify the Key Components for Adjustment to update the 1961 values. We need:

1. Current CPI-IW [2026] = 148.2
2. CPI-IW 2025 = 143.24
3. Base CPI-IW (2016) = 100
4. Linking factors for different years: 4.93 (1982); 4.63 (2001); 2.88 (2016)

Step 3: Compute the Multiplication Factor

The Multiplication Factor is derived using the formula:

$$\text{Multiplication factor} = \frac{\text{CPI-IW (reference year)}}{\text{CPI-IW base index (2016)}}$$

For January 2026:

$$\text{Multiplication factor} = \frac{148.2}{100} = 1.482$$

Step 4: Calculate the Correction Factor

The Correction Factor accounts for adjustments from previous linking factors:

$$\text{Correction Factor} = \text{Multiplication Factor} \times \text{Linking Factor (1982)} \times \text{Linking Factor (2001)} \times \text{Linking Factor (2016)} = 1.482 \times 4.93 \times 4.63 \times 2.88 = 97.42$$

This means that each 1961 value should be multiplied by 97.42 to reflect 2026 economic conditions.

Step 5: Compute the Updated Income Values by multiplying the original 1961 income values with 97.42:

Here is the same information in table form:

Table 2: Modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic classification for 2026 derived from original 1961 income values

Class	Original 1961 income (INR)	Updated 2026 income (INR, rounded)
I (Upper)	100	$100 \times 97.42 = 9,742$
II (Upper middle)	50	$50 \times 97.42 = 4,871$
III (Middle)	30	$30 \times 97.42 = 2,923$
IV (Lower middle)	15	$15 \times 97.42 = 1,461$
V (Lower)	< 15	$< 15 \times 97.42 = < 1,461$

Step 6: The Final Modified B.G. Prasad Scale 2026, with the new income thresholds for 2026 are:

Table 3: Final modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic scale for 2026 (per capita monthly income in INR)

Class	Per capita income (INR/month)
Class I (Upper)	$\geq 9,742$
Class II (Upper middle)	4,871 – 9,741
Class III (Middle)	2,923 – 4,870
Class IV (Lower middle)	1,461 – 2,922
Class V (Lower)	< 1,461

Step 7: Interpretation of the Results

The new income limits are significantly higher than in previous years due to inflation. Class I (Upper class) now starts at INR 9742 per capita per month, which means that an individual earning below this would not be classified as Upper SES. Class V (Lower class) includes individuals earning below INR 1461, reflecting the updated poverty threshold in India. The Modified B.G. Prasad Scale 2025 was recalculated using the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) of January 2025 (143.2), with adjustments made using historical linking factors from 1982, 2001, and 2016. The recalculated per capita monthly income thresholds were determined as follows: Class I (≥ 9742 INR), Class II (4,871 – 9,742 INR), Class III (2,923 – 4,871 INR), Class IV (1,461 – 2,923 INR), and Class V (< 1461 INR). Compared to previous years, the income thresholds have increased significantly, reflecting inflationary trends and economic shifts in India. This study highlights the need for real-time adjustments in socioeconomic classification and suggests incorporating multidimensional factors such as education, occupation, and regional cost-of-living variations to enhance classification accuracy. The updated classification remains crucial for healthcare planning, epidemiological research, and social policy formulation to ensure equitable resource distribution and targeted health interventions.^[3-5]

To summarise:

$$\text{Correction factor} = \frac{\text{CPI-IW (latest available for 2026)}}{\text{Base index (2016)}}$$

With the 2016 base index taken as 100. Thus,

$$\text{Correction factor} = \frac{\text{CPI-IW (2026)}}{100}$$

CPI-IW 2026 = 148.2²

Base Index 2016 = 100⁸

Each income boundary in the 2016 B. G. Prasad classification was then updated as:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Updated income value (2026)} \\ &= \text{Correction factor} \\ &\times \text{Old income value (2016)} \end{aligned}$$

CPI-IW = 148.2 (base 2016 = 100, i.e., correction factor ≈ 1.482).

This gives a correction factor for 2026 of 1.482, and the updated income thresholds were calculated by multiplying this factor by each corresponding 2016 per capita income range. [Table 1]

The resulting income ranges from the modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic scale for the year 2026, which can be used in community-based surveys, hospital-based studies, and public-health planning to classify SES on an income basis aligned with current price levels.

RESULTS

Using the calculated 2026 correction factor applied to the 2016 per capita income thresholds, the modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic classification was successfully updated for the year 2026. The scale continues to comprise five social classes (Class I to Class V), with each class defined by revised per capita monthly income cut-offs expressed in Indian Rupees.

The 2026 income limits showed a further upward shift compared to 2025, reflecting the cumulative effect of inflation and the rising cost of living.

Class I (upper class) now begins at a higher per capita income, indicating an upward displacement of the upper income threshold, while the upper bounds of Classes II and III, and the lower limits of Classes IV and V, have also increased proportionately. Despite these numerical changes, the relative ordering and conceptual interpretation of the five classes remain unchanged, preserving comparability with earlier updates. These findings confirm that periodic CPI-linked revisions are necessary to maintain the practical relevance of the modified B. G. Prasad scale for classifying socioeconomic status in contemporary epidemiological and public health research.

Table 4: Temporal Trends in Modified B. G. Prasad Socioeconomic Class Thresholds (1961–2026)

Year	Class I (≥ INR)	Class II (INR)	Class III (INR)	Class IV (INR)	Class V (INR)
1961	100	50–99	30–49	15–29	< 15
1982	493	370–492	247–369	124–246	< 124
2001	2283	1712–2282	1141–1711	570–1140	< 570
2016	6575	4931–6574	3287–4930	1644–3286	< 1644
2024	9130	4565–9129	2739–4564	1369–2738	< 1369
2025	9414	4707–9413	2824–4706	1412–2823	< 1412
2026	9742	4,871 – 9,741	2,923 – 4,870	1,461 – 2,922	< 1,461

DISCUSSION

The modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic scale for 2026 remains a simple, income-based tool that is practical for use across both urban and rural settings, but its interpretation must be situated within India’s evolving economic and social context. As with earlier revisions, the 2026 update is derived by applying a cumulative CPI IW–based correction factor to the 2016 per capita income ranges, thereby aligning all class thresholds with the sustained rise in prices and cost of living rather than with a single year’s inflation.^[6,7,9,10] This cumulative approach is consistent with prior methodological recommendations and with the 2025 update, which used a multiplication factor of 1.432 from the 2016 base, and it is preferable to relying solely on year on year inflation because it reflects long term changes in purchasing power.

The upward shift in the 2026 cut-offs for Classes I to V indicates that individuals and families now require higher per capita monthly incomes than in previous years to remain in the same socioeconomic categories, mirroring the trend seen when comparing 2021, 2023, 2024, and 2025 thresholds. This preserves the relative structure of the scale and allows longitudinal comparison, but it also implies that older studies using pre 2016 or earlier post 2016 cut offs are not directly comparable to analyses based on the 2026 limits unless income categories are harmonized. Researchers and policymakers must therefore be explicit about the reference year and CPI IW series used when interpreting SES distributions and temporal trends.^[6-7,9,10]

At the same time, limitations repeatedly highlighted for previous versions of the B. G. Prasad scale remain applicable to the 2026 update. The scale is entirely income-centric and does not incorporate key non-monetary determinants of SES, such as education, occupation, asset ownership, or cost of living differences between regions. Income-based classification is vulnerable to under or over-reporting, especially among informal sector workers with irregular earnings, and a per capita measure can misclassify households with different sizes and dependency ratios despite similar overall constraints. Moreover, applying uniform income thresholds nationwide ignores substantial urban–rural price variation, potentially overestimating SES in rural areas where cash income is lower but in-kind resources are substantial.^[6,9]

Taken together, the 2026 modified B. G. Prasad scale remains an important and convenient instrument for SES stratification in epidemiological and public health studies, provided that it is regularly updated using cumulative CPI IW.^[6,7,9,10] However, in line with recent calls from Indian literature, future work should move toward more multidimensional SES frameworks that integrate education, employment stability, assets, and regional cost of living adjustments to capture socioeconomic inequalities more comprehensively.

CONCLUSION

This study updates the modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic scale for 2026 by applying a CPI-IW–based correction factor of 1.482 (CPI-IW 2025= 148.2; base 2016 = 100) to the established 2016 per capita income ranges. The resulting thresholds retain the original five-class structure while shifting all cut-offs upward, reflecting cumulative inflation and current cost-of-living conditions. This confirms the need for periodic CPI-linked revisions to maintain the analytical validity of income-based SES classification. Nonetheless, the 2026 scale remains income-centric and should ideally be complemented by multidimensional SES measures that capture education, occupation, assets, and regional price variation.

Approval of Institutional Ethical Review Board: This study did not require approval from an institutional ethics committee because it is based entirely on secondary analysis of publicly available economic indicators, such as the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI IW), along with previously published socioeconomic classification methodologies. No human participants were recruited, no identifiable personal information was collected, and no clinical or interventional procedures were conducted; therefore, the work does not fall under the usual scope of institutional ethical review.

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Abbreviations: CPI-IW: Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers, SES: Socioeconomic Status, B.G. Prasad: Brahm Govind Prasad, INR: Indian Rupees.

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