

Ensuring Contemporary Socio-economic Classification: Updated Modified BG Prasad Scale for 2026

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ABSTRACT

Background: Socio-economic status (SES) is an important determinant of health and influences accessibility, affordability, and utilization of health care services. The BG Prasad classification, proposed in 1961, is widely used in India to assess SES in both rural and urban populations. However, due to inflation and changing economic conditions, the income limits require periodic revision using the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW). **Methods:** The updated Modified BG Prasad classification for 2026 was calculated using the CPI-IW for January 2026 (148.6; base year 2016 = 100) released by the Labour Bureau, Government of India. The revised income limits were derived using the multiplication constant obtained after applying the standard linking factors. **Results:** Using the multiplication constant 97.69, the updated per capita monthly income limits were calculated as follows: Class I \geq ₹9769; Class II ₹4885–₹9768; Class III ₹2931–₹4884; Class IV ₹1465–₹2930; and Class V $<$ ₹1465. **Conclusion:** The updated BG Prasad classification for 2026 reflects current inflation and provides a relevant tool for assessing socio-economic status in epidemiological and public health research in India.

KEYWORDS

Socio-economic Classification, BG Prasad Scale

INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic status (SES) represents the economic and social standing of an individual or household within a community. It is an important health determinant which influences, several dimensions of health care including accessibility, acceptability, affordability, and actual utilization of available services.(1) Consequently, assessment of SES is widely employed in epidemiological and public health research to understand various health inequalities and subsequently guide planning and evaluation of health interventions.(2)

India has a highly diverse socio-economic structure with marked differences between rural and urban populations in terms of education, economic opportunities, and access to health care. A considerable proportion of population continues to reside in rural areas, making accurate SES assessment important, particularly for health research and policy formulation.(3) Over time, many socio-economic scales have been developed for use in various settings. Scales such as the Modified Kuppuswamy, Srivastava, Kulshrestha, and Jalota scales are primarily applied in urban populations, whereas Udai Pareek, Shirpukar and Radhakar scales are commonly used in rural settings.(4)

Among the various classifications, the BG (Brahm Govind) Prasad socioeconomic scale, proposed originally in the

year 1961, is widely used in both urban and rural populations due to its simplicity and applicability. The scale classifies families into five socio-economic categories (Class I to Class V) based on a lone criterion that is monthly per capita income of the household, ranging from the highest income group (Class I) to the lowest (Class V). Owing to its simple framework and convenient application, the BG Prasad scale has been widely applied in community-based as well as hospital-based studies across India.(5)

However, as the scale is based solely on income, the thresholds are affected by inflation and variations in the cost of living. Over time, the original income limits become outdated and may no longer accurately represent the prevailing economic conditions.(6) Therefore, in order to ensure its continued relevance, the BG Prasad classification needs to be periodically revised using the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW), which reflects variations in retail prices and the overall cost of living.(7)

The CPI-IW is prepared and published by the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India (GOI). (8) Since its inception in 1944, the index has undergone revisions periodically, with successive base years of 1960, 1982, 2001, and the latest base year of 2016 (2016 = 100), which has been effective

since September 2020.(9) The CPI-IW represents variations in retail prices of a fixed basket of goods and services used by industrial workers in urban areas. In the current 2016 base series, price data for 463 items are collected from 317 markets across 88 selected centres every month.(10) It is widely used for wage regulation, calculation of dearness allowance, and monitoring inflation, thereby serving as a reliable indicator for revising income-based socio-economic classifications.(7) Given the continuing impact of inflation and periodic revisions in CPI-IW, regular updating of BG Prasad's scale is imperative to preserve its utility as a feasible and comparable measure of socio-economic status in India. The present article provides the updated Modified BG Prasad socioeconomic classification for year 2026 based on the latest available CPI-IW values.

MATERIAL & METHODS

The updated Modified BG Prasad socioeconomic classification for the year 2026 was calculated using the most recent CPI-IW published by the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, GOI. As per the official press release dated 27 February 2026, the All-India CPI-IW for January 2026 (base year 2016 = 100) was reported as 148.6.(11) This index value was used to revise the income limits of the BG Prasad scale so that the classification reflects the prevailing cost of living.

To update the income limits, a multiplication factor was first calculated by dividing the current CPI-IW value by the base index value of the latest CPI series (2016 = 100). The multiplication factor thus obtained represents the proportional change in price levels since the base year.

$$\text{Multiplication factor} = \frac{\text{CPI-IW for January 2026}}{\text{Base index value (2016 = 100)}} = \frac{148.6}{100} = 1.486$$

The original BG Prasad scale was based on income limits defined in 1961 (Table1).(12) However, the CPI-IW series has undergone several revisions with different base years over time. To maintain coherence between these series, linking factors are applied while converting the income values from the earlier series to the current series. The linking factors used for the present calculation were 4.93 for the transition from the 1960 to the 1982 series, 4.63 for the 1982 to the 2001 series, and 2.88 for the 2001 to the 2016 series. (Table 2)(1)

Accordingly, the revised income values were derived using the following formula:(13)

$$\text{New income value} = \text{Multiplication factor} \times (\text{Old income value} \times 4.93 \times 4.63 \times 2.88)$$

Substituting the multiplication factor calculated for January 2026:

$$\text{New income value} = 1.486 \times (\text{Old income value} \times 4.93 \times 4.63 \times 2.88)$$

Table 4 Comparison of BG Prasad's socio-economic status classification for 1961, January 2025 and January 2026

Social class	Per capita monthly income limits (in INR/month 1961)(12)	Updated per capita monthly income (INR) for January 2025 (13)	Updated per capita monthly income (INR) for January 2026
I (Upper)	100 and above	9400 and above	9769 and above
II (Upper middle)	50–99	4700-9399	4885 – 9768
III (Middle)	30–49	2820-4699	2931 – 4884
IV (Lower middle)	15–29	1410-2819	1465 – 2930
V (Lower)	<15	<1410	<1465

This simplifies to:

$$\text{New income value} = 97.69 \times \text{Old income value}$$

The obtained value represents the lower limit of each socioeconomic class in the Modified BG Prasad scale. Using this multiplication constant, the updated monthly per capita income limits corresponding to the five socioeconomic classes were calculated for January 2026 and are presented in the subsequent table. (Table 3)

RESULTS

Using the most recent CPI-IW released by the Labour Bureau for January 2026 (148.6), the income limits of the BG Prasad socio-economic classification were recalculated.(11) The updated income thresholds were determined by multiplying the original income limits of the BG Prasad scale (1961) (Table 1)(12) with the derived multiplication constant of 97.69. The calculated values represent the lower limit for each income category. For easier interpretation and practical application in community-based and epidemiological studies, the values were rounded to the nearest whole number. The updated Modified BG Prasad socio-economic classification for January 2026 is presented in Table 3.

Table 1 Original BG Prasad's socio-economic status classification, 1961

Social class	Per capita monthly income limits (in INR/month)
I Upper	100 and above
II Upper middle	50–99
III Middle	30–49
IV Lower middle	15–29
V Lower	<15

Table 2 Linking factors for the calculation of per capita income from the year 1960 to 2016

Price index year	Base value	Linking factors between the years (according to Labour Bureau)	Value
1960	100	1960–1982	4.93
1982	100	1982–2001	4.63
2001	100	2001–2016	2.88
2016	100	—	—

Table 3 Updated BG Prasad's socio-economic status classification for January 2026

Social class	Updated per capita monthly income (INR) for January 2026
I (Upper)	9769 and above
II (Upper middle)	4885 – 9768
III (Middle)	2931 – 4884
IV (Lower middle)	1465 – 2930
V (Lower)	<1465

DISCUSSION

The BG Prasad scale is commonly applied for the assessment of socio-economic status in both rural and urban populations in India due to its simple structure and practical applicability. The classification uses the CPI-IW to classify families into different socio-economic categories based on monthly per capita income. Since the CPI-IW reflects the consumption pattern of working-class households, it provides a suitable basis for revising income limits in accordance with inflation and changing economic conditions.

Periodic revision of the scale is necessary as the income thresholds defined in the original classification gradually lose relevance with rising cost of living. A recent update was reported in 2025 by Shah P et al,⁽¹³⁾ wherein the BG Prasad scale was revised using the CPI-IW for January 2025 (143.2). According to that revision, families with a monthly per capita income of ₹9400 and above were classified as upper class, ₹4700 – ₹9399 as upper middle class, ₹2820 – ₹4699 as middle class, ₹1410 – ₹2819 as lower middle class, and below ₹1410 as lower class.

In the present study, the CPI-IW for January 2026 was reported as 148.6, indicating a further increase in the cost of living. Using the recommended linking factors along with the derived multiplication constant of 97.69, the income limits of the BG Prasad scale were recalculated. Accordingly, families with a monthly per capita income of ₹9769 and above were categorized as upper class, ₹4885 – ₹9768 as upper middle class, ₹2931 – ₹4884 as middle class, ₹1465 – ₹2930 as lower middle class, and below ₹1465 as lower class. These revised thresholds reflect the prevailing economic conditions and may facilitate more accurate socio-economic categorization in contemporary epidemiological and community-based studies. A comparison of the original scale, with the previous 2 updates has been illustrated in Table 4.

Regular updating of the BG Prasad classification remains essential to ensure that socio-economic assessment remains relevant in public health research and policy planning. Periodic revisions based on the latest CPI-IW values enable researchers and policymakers to use a standardized and contemporary tool for socio-economic classification. Despite its simplicity and broad applicability, the BG Prasad scale relies exclusively on income and does not incorporate other important determinants of socio-economic status, including land ownership, assets, occupation, and social participation. Nevertheless, due to its practicality and comparability across studies, the Modified BG Prasad scale continues to serve as an important method for socio-economic assessment in India

CONCLUSION

The Modified BG Prasad socio-economic classification remains a simple and broadly applicable method for evaluating socio-economic status in both rural and urban populations in India. Nevertheless, since it relies on

monthly per capita income, regular revision is required to accommodate inflation and shifts in economic conditions. By utilising the latest CPI-IW for January 2026, the income limits of the BG Prasad scale were recalculated to reflect the prevailing cost of living.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

All authors have contributed equally.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

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