

Short Communication

Revamping socioeconomic assessment: 2026 updates to the B. G. Prasad and modified Kuppuswamy scales

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ABSTRACT

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a key determinant of health and well-being, influencing access to resources, services, and opportunities. In India, the B. G. Prasad and modified Kuppuswamy scales are widely used tools for classifying SES in public health research. However, due to inflation and ongoing economic changes, these scales require periodic revision to maintain their relevance and accuracy. The B. G. Prasad scale, which is based on per capita income, is updated using the consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW), incorporating established linking factors from 1960 to 2016. Similarly, the modified Kuppuswamy scale, which assesses SES based on education, occupation, and total family income, undergoes regular revisions in which income thresholds are adjusted using the latest CPI-IW values. Based on the financial inflation data for January 2026, the revised B. G. Prasad scale categorizes socioeconomic classes with an updated upper-class per capita income threshold of ₹9,769 and above. Correspondingly, the modified Kuppuswamy scale reflects revised household income categories, with the highest socioeconomic class defined by a monthly family income of ₹66,007 and above. These updates improve the accuracy of socioeconomic classification, thereby supporting more reliable research findings, effective public health interventions, and informed policy formulation. Nevertheless, limitations remain, particularly with regard to regional variations in cost of living and the broader multidimensional nature of socioeconomic status, highlighting the need for continued refinement of these classification tools to enhance their applicability across diverse Indian settings.

Keywords: B. G. Prasad scale, Income classification, Modified Kuppuswamy scale, Social class, Socioeconomic status

INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic status (SES) is a crucial determinant of health, education, and overall quality of life. In India, the Kuppuswamy and B. G. Prasad socioeconomic scales have been widely used to classify individuals and families based on their economic and social standing. These scales serve as essential tools for policymakers, researchers, and healthcare professionals, helping to assess disparities in access to resources and guide targeted interventions. However, given the dynamic nature of the economy, marked by inflation, currency fluctuations, and changes in

purchasing power, these SES scales require regular updates to maintain their accuracy and relevance.^{1,2} The Kuppuswamy socioeconomic status scale, introduced in 1976, classifies SES based on education, occupation, and family income. While education and occupation remain stable, the income component requires regular updates to reflect inflation and economic changes. This scale is particularly useful in urban areas with greater occupational and educational diversity.

The B. G. Prasad scale, proposed in 1961, categorizes SES based on per capita monthly income and is applicable in

both urban and rural areas. Income brackets are updated using the consumer price index (CPI) to account for inflation and maintain the scale's relevance.³

With 2026 bringing another round of economic changes, updated versions of these scales are essential for ensuring accurate SES classification. These updates are particularly important in fields such as public health, epidemiology, and social research, where SES plays a critical role in determining outcomes.

This study aims to discuss the significance of the Kuppuswamy and B. G. Prasad scales, their historical evolution, the methodology behind their updates, and the most recent revisions for 2026.

METHODS

This study is a methodological update conducted in February 2026, that recalculates the income thresholds of the B. G. Prasad and modified Kuppuswamy socioeconomic scales using the consumer price index for industrial workers (CPI-IW) for January 2026 and established linking factors.

The income thresholds for the B. G. Prasad and modified Kuppuswamy socioeconomic scales were updated using CPI-IW data for January 2026. Inflation adjustments were made using the standard linking factors for the 1960–1982, 1982–2001, and 2001–2016 CPI series. All calculations were performed using Microsoft Excel.

B. G. Prasad scale

The B. G. Prasad socioeconomic scale, originally developed in the 1960s, was constructed based on the cost-of-living index.⁴ By 1993–94, inflation rates were adjusted using the all-India wholesale price index (WPI) series.⁵ To account for economic fluctuations, the Laspeyres formula was employed to adjust for inflationary changes, and the concept of linking factors was introduced to ensure consistency in socioeconomic classification over time.

Due to its simplicity and ease of use, the B. G. Prasad classification remains one of the most commonly adopted tools for researchers and policymakers. It was developed using the 1960 base year of the CPI-IW, set at 100. The CPI-IW is regularly updated by the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Government of India, with the most recent data released for January 2026.

The CPI-IW measures the changes in retail prices for a specific basket of goods and services typically consumed by industrial workers. This index directly impacts the wages and dearness allowance of millions of workers across India. It is also essential in inflation measurement and shaping government policies. The development of CPI-IW began during World War I, when rising prices worsened workers' economic conditions. In response, provincial governments initiated family budget surveys,

leading to the central government starting its own CPI-IW compilation in 1941, as recommended by the Rau Court of Enquiry.⁶

By 1958, the Labor Bureau adopted a more structured and scientific approach to compiling the index. Initially, the base year was set as 1960=100, later updated to 1982=100 in 1988, 2001=100 in 2006, and 2016=100 in 2020.⁷ Over time, the coverage expanded from factory and mine workers to include sectors like railways, electricity, ports and docks, plantations, establishments of electricity generations and distribution, and public motor transport undertakings. Today, CPI-IW is compiled monthly from 317 markets across 88 industrial centers. The All-India CPI-IW for the month of January 2026 was 148.6.⁸

The B. G. Prasad classification, which uses per capita income, depends heavily on the CPI-IW for accurate income classification. Regular updates are essential to reflect inflation and ensure the scale remains relevant. Table 1 shows the revised B. G. Prasad scale for the year 2026.

Calculation

To update the B. G. Prasad classification based on income levels, the following steps are involved.

The formula used was given as follows.

New income

$$= (\text{Multiplication factor as per current CPI} - \text{IW}) \times (\text{old income}) \times (\text{linking factor for 1960} - 1982) \times (\text{linking factor for 1982} - 2001) \times (\text{linking factor for 2001} - 2016)$$

The linking factors obtained from the Labour Bureau of India were 4.63 for 1960–1982, 4.93 for 1982–2001, and 2.88 for 2001–2016.

The multiplication factor was calculated by dividing the current CPI-IW value by the base index value of 2016.

With the CPI-IW for January 2026 being 148.6 and the base index of 2016 set at 100, the multiplication factor was calculated as $148.6/100=1.486$.

Step 1: Calculate the new income according to the latest levels since the original base year (1960)

The formula for calculating the new income is given as follows.⁹

New income

$$= (\text{Multiplication factor as per current CPI} - \text{IW}) \times (\text{old income}) \times (\text{linking factor for 1960} - 1982) \times (\text{linking factor for 1982} - 2001) \times (\text{linking factor for 2001} - 2016)$$

Step 2: Obtain the linking factors from the Labor Bureau of India

Linking factor for 1960-1982 = 4.63, linking factor for 1982-2001=4.93, and linking factor for 2001-2016=2.88.¹⁰

Step 3: Calculation of the multiplication factor as per the current CPI-IW

The multiplication factor is based on the current CPI-IW divided by the base index value in 2016.

For example, with a CPI-IW of 148.6 for January 2026, and a base index of 100 in 2016, the following formula is used.⁸

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Multiplication factor} &= \text{Current CPI} \\ &- \text{IW of January 2026} \\ &/ \text{base index value in 2016} \\ &= 148.6/100 = 1.486 \end{aligned}$$

Step 4: Calculation for the new income

It is by using the formula mentioned below.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{New income} &= 1.486 \times 100 \times 4.63 \times 4.93 \times 2.88 \\ &= 9769 \end{aligned}$$

Step 5: Calculation for the five classes of the modified B. G. Prasad classification

It is given in Table 1.

Kuppuswamy scale

The Kuppuswamy socioeconomic status scale is a widely used tool in India for classifying SES based on three factors: monthly family income (Table 2), education (Table 3), and occupation (Table 4). Out of the three, the family's income is taken into account for the entire family, while the education and occupation of the family's head are taken into account.¹¹ The scale is calculated by assigning specific scores to each of these components. The income factor, which is the most variable, is updated annually using the CPI-IW to adjust for inflation. This ensures that the income thresholds reflect the changing cost of living over time. The education and occupation components are based on predefined classifications, with scores assigned depending on the highest level of education attained by the head of the family and the type of occupation held. The total score, which combines these three factors, determines the classification into one of the socioeconomic categories, such as lower, upper lower, lower middle, upper middle, or upper class (Table 5). The income thresholds for each category are revised based on CPI-IW data.⁸ The base year was considered to be 2016.^{12,13}

The revised income per month has been calculated as follows: price index by old base (1960) for the year 1976=2.96, linking factor between 1960 and 1982 series=4.63, linking factor between 1982 and 2001 series=4.93, and linking factor between 2001 and 2016 series=2.88.

The linking factors have been obtained from the website www.labourbureau.nic.in.

New income values for the year 2016 is given as follows.⁹

$$\begin{aligned} \text{New income values} &= (\text{Old value} \times 2.88 \times 4.63 \times 4.93) \\ &/ 2.96 \end{aligned}$$

For the 2026 values, we must see the current CPI-IW (base 2016=100).

The value of the index for January 2026 is 148.6.¹¹

The updated values have been calculated as follows.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{New income value} &= 1.486 \times (\text{old value} \times 2.88 \times 4.63 \\ &\times 4.93) / 2.96 \end{aligned}$$

RESULTS

For modified BG Prasad scale calculation

The revised income level was determined by applying the above mentioned formula, which resulted in a value of ₹9,769 for upper class.

$$\text{New income} = 1.486 \times 100 \times 4.63 \times 4.93 \times 2.88$$

Similarly, for upper middle class, the value comes out to be ₹4884 - ₹9768, middle class ₹2930 - ₹4883, lower middle class ₹1465 - ₹2929, and lower class, less than ₹1464 (Table 1).

Table 1: Modified B. G. Prasad socioeconomic status scale classification for 2026.

Socioeconomic class	Original classification of 1961 based on monthly/capita income (INR)	Updated scale for 2026 based on monthly/capita income (INR)
I (upper class)	100 and above	9769 and above
II (upper middle class)	50-99	4884-9768
III (middle class)	30-49	2930-4883
IV (lower middle class)	15-29	1465-2929
V (lower class)	Less than 15	Less than 1464

For revised modified Kuppuswamy scale

The revised income level was determined by applying the above mentioned formula, which resulted in a value of ₹66007 for 1st group.

$$\text{New income} = 1.486 \times (2000 \times 2.88 \times 4.63 \times 4.93) / 2.96$$

Similarly, for 2nd, the value comes out to be ₹33004 - ₹66006, 3rd ₹24753 - ₹33003, 4th ₹16503 - ₹24752 and 5th ₹9901- ₹16501, 6th ₹3301 - ₹9900 and 7th less than ₹3300 (Table 2).

Further scoring of the occupation and education of the family needs to be accounted to calculate the revised modified Kuppuswamy socioeconomic status scale (Tables 3-5).

Table 2: Updated family income in 2026.

S. no.	Family income in INR (1976)	Updated monthly family income in INR (2026)	Scores
1	≥2000	≥66007	12
2	1000-1999	33004-66006	10
3	750-999	24753-33003	6
4	500-749	16502-24752	4
5	300-499	9901-16501	3
6	101-299	3301-9900	2
7	≤100	≤3300	1

Table 3: Education of the head of the family.

Education level	Score
Postgraduate and above	7
Graduate	6
Higher secondary	5
Middle school	4
Primary school	3
Illiterate	1

Table 4: Occupation of the head of the family.

Occupation	Score
Legislators, senior officials, managers	10
Professionals	9
Technicians/associate professionals	8
Clerk	7
Skilled worker, shop and market sales workers	6
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	5
Craft and related trade workers	4
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	3
Elementary occupation	2
Unemployed	1

Table 5: Revised modified Kuppuswamy socioeconomic status scale.

S. no.	Score	Socioeconomic class
1	26-29	Upper class (I)
2	16-25	Upper middle class (II)
3	11-15	Lower middle class (III)
4	5-10	Upper lower class (IV)
5	Less than 5	Lower class (V)

DISCUSSION

This update to modified B. G. Prasad scale and Kuppuswamy scale for 2026 is essential to account for inflationary changes and to improve the relevance of these scales in current scenario. A similar study conducted by Jabeen et al in 2025 reflected the class I threshold as ₹8592, which is lower than the current study reflecting inflation over the past year.¹⁴ Further it also stated the threshold of Kuppuswamy scale as ₹60,125 for the 1st group, as compared to ₹66007 in the present study, also highlighting the inflation in the past year.

The B. G. Prasad socioeconomic classification is a widely used tool in public health research in India. Unlike the Kuppuswamy scale, it classifies socioeconomic status solely on the basis of per capita monthly income, making it simple, quick to apply, and suitable for both urban and rural populations. Because it relies only on income, it avoids complexities related to educational and occupational categorization and is therefore frequently used in large epidemiological surveys and field-based studies. The scale is periodically updated using the CPI-IW along with linking factors, allowing it to remain relevant despite inflation and economic changes.

However, the B. G. Prasad scale also has several limitations. Its primary drawback is the exclusive reliance on income as the indicator of socioeconomic status, which does not fully capture the multidimensional nature of SES. Important aspects such as education, occupation, social capital, living conditions, asset ownership, and access to healthcare or social services are not included. Income reporting may also be inaccurate or variable, particularly among individuals engaged in informal employment, seasonal work, or agriculture, which is common in many parts of India. Furthermore, the scale does not account for regional variations in cost of living, which may lead to misclassification of households with similar incomes but different purchasing power. Household size can also influence per capita income calculations, sometimes masking actual economic disparities within families.

The Kuppuswamy socioeconomic status scale is also widely used for classifying SES due to its simplicity, ease of use, and ability to adapt to inflation via the CPI-IW. It is also cost-effective and widely accepted in public health and social science research. However, its focus on income, education, and occupation overlooks other factors like

wealth, asset ownership, and access to services. The scale is more suited to urban settings and may not fully capture the complexity of rural or diverse social structures. There is also confusion about where to classify homemakers and retired people, and individuals studying in gurukuls or madrassas are not adequately accounted for.⁴ Furthermore, its static occupational categories and income-based classification can lead to misclassification across regions with varying costs of living, limiting its effectiveness in modern, multidimensional assessments of SES.

CONCLUSION

The updated income values in the Kuppuswamy and B. G. Prasad classifications are crucial for accurately assessing socio-economic status in India. The modified BG Prasad classification, with current income scales, allows social class to be used as an ordinal variable, benefiting health research. The Kuppuswamy classification, with updated income-based scores, enables researchers to form quartile-based groups for more detailed analysis. Despite these advancements, the challenge lies in ensuring these tools remain adaptive to the evolving socio-economic landscape of India. The BG Prasad scale, while simple and income-based, lacks a multidimensional approach as it does not consider factors like education and occupation, unlike the Kuppuswamy scale, which provides a more holistic assessment. However, both scales face limitations, particularly their reliance on CPI-IW, which excludes rural workers and agricultural laborers, making them less applicable to diverse economic settings.

It is essential for researchers and policymakers to apply these classifications in the appropriate context, reflecting the complexities of the country's diverse socio-economic factors. The ongoing development of these tools is key to ensuring a more accurate and relevant understanding of socio-economic status in contemporary India.

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