THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT
(HOUSE OF COMMONS)
House of commons is the name of lower house of the British Parliament which powers developed gradually. In the beginning, it had very little powers, however, gradually from a humble petitioner. It has become ‘Sovereign Legislator’. Describing the summery of the House of Commons. In the context of the importance of House of Commons, Walpole Spencer writes, “When a minister consults Parliament, he consults the House of commons, when the queen dissolves Parliament, she dissolves the House of commons and a new Parliament is a simply a new House of Commons.”
COMPOSITION OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS: The total strength of the member of House of Commons is 650 and these are elected from Single Member Constituencies on the basis of universal adult franchise and every man and women who has attained the age of 18 years or more and is the citizen of Great Britain is entitled to vote.

QUALIFICATION OF MEMBERS: – (i) He must be the citizen of the Great Britain, (ii) He must attained the age of 21 years or more, (iii) His name must be in the electoral list.

Exception: – Aliens, members of the house of Lords, Roman Catholic Bishops and the Bishops of the Established Church of England, Scotland and Ireland, Lunatics, Bankrupts and convicted criminals etc, these people can not contest the elections of the House of commons.
METHOD OF ELECTION: – For the purpose of the election of the House of commons, the whole country is divided into single member constituencies. In the electoral constituency, every adult man and woman vote secretly for the candidate of his choice. After the voting, votes are counted and the candidate getting maximum votes declared elected.

TENURE OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS: – Under the Parliament Act, 1911, the tenure of the House of the commons has been fixed at five years.. Its tenure can be extended in the case of war and emergency.

SESSION OF THE HOUSE: – The session of the House of Commons works for 160 to 170 days in a year. It meets 5 days in a week i.e. from Monday to Friday. Its meeting begins at 2:30 and continues up to late night.

QUORAM OF THE HOUSE: – 40 members.
SALARY AND ALLOWANCES OF THE MEMBERS:– They get a salary of $ 66,650 per annum. Besides, they also get Secretarial allowance and Daily Allowance during the session days.

PRIVILEGES OF THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS:– (i) Members have full freedom of expressing their views in the House and no action can be taken against them for views in the House.

(ii) Members can not be arrested in a civil suit 40 days before and 40 days after the session. (iii) House can made its own rules of procedure. (iv) House can give punishment for contempt for the House.
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE: – Speaker is the presiding officer of the house who elected by the members of the House.

* John Bercow is the present Speaker of the House of Commons.

OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE HOUSE: – Besides the speaker and Deputy Speakers, House has clerk of the House and assistant Clerks.

WHIPS: – Every parties appoint Whip to maintain discipline among its members.
WORKING OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The session of the House is convened by the King on the advice of the Prime Minister. Before the entry of the members into the House, guards make round of the House with old types of lamps. This ritual had its origin in the ‘Gunpowder Plot of 1605’. After the examination of the Parliament House, members of both the Houses assembles in their respective houses. After this, an official of the House of Lords invites the members of the House of Commons to come in the House of lords. After the arrival of the members of the House of Commons to House of Lords, Lord Chancellor reads to them the royal decree about summoning the session of Parliament.

SPEECH FROM THRONE:– On the third day, members of the House of commons again meet in the House of lords to listen the ‘Speech from the Throne’. 
DEBATE ON THE SPEECH FROM THE THRONE:– After the speech from the throne, members of the houses meet separately in their respective houses and discuss the Speech from the Throne and pass the vote of thanks.

CLOSING OF THE SESSION:– The session of the House is closed with many colourful ceremonies. The members of the House of Commons are invited to the House of Lords where the Lord Chancellor reads to them the royal decree about the closure of the session of Parliament.

DAILY SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE:– Daily sitting of the House of commons are held from Monday to Friday at 2:30 P.M. and continue upto late night.

DAILY ORDER OF THE BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE:– Each day first 45 minutes are kept reserve for asking questions from the ministers.
RULES RELATING TO THE ASKING OF THE QUESTIONS:

(i) Each member can send questions, either personally or by post.
(ii) In order to get the answer of the questions, prior notice of the two days must be given.
(iii) The answer to questions can be oral or written.
(iv) The written answers of the questions are printed in the magazine of the House which is known as Hansard.
(v) A member can ask only two oral questions and as many as he wants written questions in a day.
(vi) Members have the right to ask supplementary questions also.
MOTIONS TO CLOSE THE DEBATE

- Some methods are used to close debates. These are:
  - SIMPLE CLOSURE—After thorough discussion on a bill, any member can move the motion for the closure of the debate.
  - GUILLOTINE CLOSURE:—The bill is divided into different parts and the time is fixed for debate on each part.
  - KANGROO CLOSURE:—Under this arrangement, speaker does not hold discussion on all the clauses of the bill, rather he leaves some clauses and holds discussions only on some important clauses.
POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

1. LEGISLATIVE FUNCTIONS:– 90% of the ordinary bills are first introduced in the House of Commons and the house of Lords can just delay the ordinary bills passed by the House of Commons for one year only.

2. CONSTITUTIONAL FUNCTIONS:– In England, no distinction is made between ordinary law and constitutional law. The laws passed by Parliament are the constitution in England.

3. FINANCIAL FUNCTIONS:– (i) Money bill can be introduced first in the House of commons only.

(ii) If there is dispute whether the concerned bill is money bill or not, then the decision of the speaker of the House of the Commons is final.

(iii) No tax can be imposed without the approval of the house of Commons.

(iv) This House gives approval to expenditure to be incurred by various departments.
CONTROL OVER EXECUTIVE:– (i) Members of the House of Commons can ask questions about administration from the ministers and can criticize the ministers.(ii) Members of this house can draw the attention of the cabinet to any particular issue by moving Call attention Motion, Adjournment Motion etc.

JUDICIAL FUNCTIONS:–(i) House of commons can recommended to the king the removal of the judges of high courts by carrying impeachment proceedings against them.(ii) It take action against members who commit contempt of the house.(iii) Matters concerning the breach of privileges of the are investigated by this house.

ELECTORAL FUNCTIONS:– Members of this house elect Speaker and Deputy Speaker and others.
The mutual relations of the house of Lords and House of Commons can be properly understood by studying the following views—

1. LEGISLATIVE RELATIONS

2. FINANCIAL RELATION

3. EXECUTIVE RELATIONS

4. JUDICIAL RELATIONS
In England, there is existence of Parliamentary government. In theory, the principle of ‘Supremacy of Parliament’ has been accepted in England and there is no limitation on its powers. Therefore, the powers of parliament can be studied in the following ways:

1. **LEGISLATIVE POWERS:** The main function of the parliament is to make laws and it can pass law on any subject; it can amend the old laws and it can reject these laws also. In England, Judiciary can not exercise the powers of judicial review on the laws made by Parliament.

2. **EXECUTIVE POWERS:** Executive i.e. Council of ministers are responsible for all their acts before Parliament.

3. **FINANCIAL POWERS:** It has full authority over national finance. Government can not impose any tax or spend any money without the consent of the Parliament.
**JUDICIAL POWERS:** In England, the parliament is the highest court of appeal. Besides, Parliament can pass motion for removing the judges of high courts after initiating impeachment proceedings.

**CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS:** Laws passed by Parliament are considered as constitutional laws.

**POWERS TO DETERMINE NATIONAL POLICIES:** Parliament gives approval and cabinet formulates national policies. Thus, Parliament contributes in the formulation of the policy.
REAL ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENT

1. Ventilation of the grievance of People
2. Function of Criticism
3. To provide link between the Government and the People.
4. To provide Political Education
5. To get information
7. Important Issues like defence, foreign trade, home policy, environment etc, are discussed.
DECLINE IN THE POWERS OF THE PARLIAMENT

1. Dominance of the Cabinet
2. Tight control of the Political Parties
3. Cabinet can get the House of Commons Dissolved
4. Technical nature of Legislation
5. Provision of Delegated Legislation
6. Misuse of the power to issue order-in-council
7. Cabinet’s control over the working of the Parliament
8. Bi-party system and Political Stability
Sovereignty of Parliament is an important characteristic of the constitution of Great Britain. In Great Britain Parliament means King, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. In this context, DE-LOME writes, “British Parliament can do everything, except to make a women a man and a man a women.”
DEFINITION OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF PARLIAMENT

Acc to Blackstone, “The British Parliament has sovereign and uncontrollable authority in the making, confirming, enlarging, restraining, abrogating, repealing, revising and explaining of all laws.”

Acc to Sir Ivor Jennings, “So supreme is the authority of British Parliament that it can not limited even by its own legislation.”
FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SOVEREIGNTY OF PARLIAMENT IN ENGLAND

- Unwritten constitution
- Flexible constitution
- No recognition to the principle of the Supremacy of the constitution
- Absence of the power of Judicial Review
- Unitary Government
- Parliamentary government
CRITICISM OF PRINCIPLE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF BRITISH PARLIAMENT

- Public Interests
- Public opinion
- Pressure Groups
- Customs and conventions
- Common laws
- Morality
- Delegated Legislation
- Veto power of the King
- Rule of law
- Cabinet can get the House of Commons Dissolved
- Newspapers, Radio, and Political Parties etc.
- Dominions and their Parliament
- International law
- European Union
- Separated Parliament for Scotland and Assemblies for Wales and Northern Ireland.
In England, the presiding officer of the House of Commons is called the speaker. The office of Speaker is an office of much honour and prestige in England and in other countries, the Speaker gets as much respect and honour as speaker in England.

**Election of the Speaker:** The election of the speaker is held according to the directive of the king. In reality, the Speaker is not elected, rather he is appointed unanimously by the House.

**QUALIFICATION:** Qualification for the office of the speaker are the same as for becoming the member of the House of commons.

**Tenure:** Tenure of the office of the speaker is concurrent with the tenure of the House.

**REMOVAL OF THE SPEAKER FROM OFFICE:** He can be removed from office by the House by passing a resolution against him by majority.

**SALARY:** His salary and allowance as fixed by the Parliament from time to time.
CONVENTIONS RELATED TO THE OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

- Speaker is nominated unanimously
- At the time of general elections, no opponent contests from Speaker’s Constituency
- Once a speaker, is always Speaker
- Speaker is generally a back Bencher
- Speaker speaks least
- Speaker breaks his relations with his Party
- Use of casting vote.
POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE SPEAKER

- To preside over the meeting of the house
- To maintain discipline in the House
- To fix the programme of the House
- To give permission to ask Questions
- To conduct the business of the House
- To interpret the rules
- To adjourn the House
- Decision about Money Bill
- To certify the Bills
- To exercise Casting Vote
- Protection of the privileges of the members of the House
- Link between the King and the House of Commons
- Control over the visitors Galleries
- Nomination of the members of the Parliamentary Delegation
- To preside over the meetings of the chairman of Parliament of Commonwealth Countries.
REFERENCES

- Dr. S.R. Mahashwari, “Comparative study of Governments and Politics” Lakshmi Narain Agrawal, 2004