The right of putting questions to Minister for the purpose of eliciting information regarding matters under their administrative control is one of the later developments in parliamentary practice. Indeed, in India, the right of putting questions was given to the members of the Legislatures for the first time in 1892 by the Indian Councils Act of that year. Even then, the right was given not so much as an accession to any demand, but as out of necessity, as the Government felt the want of a medium through which Government policy might be made public. The Government of India was pressing for conferring the right of asking questions on the Legislatures.¹ In recent times, questions have been used for the purpose of focussing public attention to specific grievances or of eliciting information regarding the Government's intentions. It is also extensively used by members to bring the grievances of their constituencies to the attention of the Government. The right to ask questions was first granted in 1892.

Lord Curzon said during the debate on the Indian Councils Bill:²

¹ Despatch of Lord Dufferin, Nov. 1888 and also Despatch of Lord Lansdowne, Aug. 1889.
² Parl. Deb. 28 Mar. 1892, cc. 60-61.
The second change introduced by the Bill is the concession of the right of interpellation or of asking questions. It is proposed to give to members of both classes of Councils, the Supreme and the Provincial Councils, this right of asking questions on matters of public interest. But both this privilege and the one to which I have previously alluded will be subject, under the terms of the Act, to such conditions and restrictions as may be prescribed in rules made by the Governor-General or the Provincial Governors.

The merits of this proposal are self-evident. It is desirable in the first place in the interest of the Government, which is at the present moment without the means of making known its policy, or of answering criticism or animadversions, or of silencing calumny, and it is also desirable in the interests of the public, who, in the absence of correct official information, are apt to be misled, and to entertain erroneous ideas, apprehensions and to entertain unjust ideas.

The right to ask supplementaries was given in 1909. As Lord Morely explained in his dispatch to the Government of India:

"In respect of rules on the asking of questions, I have come to the conclusion that, subject to such restrictions as may be found requisite in practice and to the existing general powers of the President, the asking of supplementary questions should be allowed. Without these, a system of formal question met by formal replies must inevitably tend to become unreal and ineffective, and in an assembly in which under proper safeguards, free discussion and debate is permitted and encouraged, there can be no sufficient reason for prohibiting that method of eliciting information and expressing indirectly the opinions and wishes of the questioners."

The right to ask supplementaries was however restricted to the questioner. The right was given to all members by the Government of India Act, 1919.

3 Dispatch dated 27 Nov. 1908.
Interpellation

Lord Curzon in speaking when introducing the Indian Councils Act in 1892 and Lord Lansdowne in his speech before the Indian Legislative Council used the expression 'right of interpellation' when speaking of the new right which was conferred on the Councils. The right that was given was not however strictly the right of interpellation which has a technical meaning in parliamentary procedure. What was conferred was the right to put questions for eliciting information as it obtained in the British House of Commons.

An interpellation (as known in France) is 'a request made through the President of either House to a Minister by a private member for an oral explanation of some matter for which the Minister is responsible. The President invariably informs the House of this request, and in some Parliaments the House concerned may disallow its further proceeding. The delivery of the explanation initiates a debate, which is usually (but not always) brought to a conclusion by the taking of a vote. In those countries where a vote is taken, a reverse in the Upper House is not as damaging to the Government as a defeat in the Lower. Limits are

4 Parl. Deb. 23 Mar. 1892, c. 60; Proceedings of Legislative Council of India, 1893, p. 47.
frequently set to the length of speeches. The procedure of interpellation does not exist in British or Irish procedure.*

**Starred and Unstarred Questions**

Questions are classified into two categories -
(a) questions to which oral answers are required, that is to say, questions which must be answered by the Minister on the floor of the House; and (b) questions to which oral answers are not required.6

If a member wants an oral answer to his question he has to put a star mark on the question; such questions have therefore come to be called 'starred' questions. The other kind of question is consequently known as 'unstarred'. In Indian Legislatures, the Presiding Officer is authorised by the rules to treat a question as unstarred if he thinks a written answer would be more suitable provided that if a member can satisfy him that an oral answer is necessary, the question may be treated as a starred one.

**To whom a Question can be put**

Although it is mainly the Ministers to whom questions

5 Campion and Lidderdale, European Parliamentary Procedure, p. 33.
6 L.A.D. vol. II, 1921, p. 98(b)
are put, a question can also be put to another member; but a question to a member must relate to some matter, e.g., a Bill, connected with the business of the Legislature for which such member is responsible and not to any matter, e.g., acts done or words spoken by a member outside the House or to any matter for which another member is responsible.

When, however, a member is mentioned in a motion before the House and he appears in a bad light in such a motion and a question also is put to such member, the member can be allowed to make a statement to clarify his position although the acts or words complained of may have been done or spoken outside the House.

The following ruling of the Speaker of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly will clearly indicate the position.


9 Parl. Deb. 5th series, vol. 141, c. 194.

"I allowed Sj. Majumdar only to make a statement because he was the subject of an adjournment motion tabled by Sj. Jyoti Basu in which he seemed to appear in a bad light as his name had been unfortunately mentioned in connection with some business of the House namely Sj. Jyoti Basu's adjournment motion. In such a case Sj. Majumdar was perfectly entitled to clear up the position by making a statement and I gave him permission accordingly.

"In a similar case in the House of Commons when Mr. Attlee, the Leader of the Opposition in the House of Commons, became subject of a criticism in a motion he had been allowed to make a personal statement with a view to clearing himself of the charge (vide House of Commons Debates dated 13 December 1937).

"In another case in the House of Commons, Mr. Speaker ruled that it was in Order for an unofficial hon. member to ask another unofficial hon. member a Question on some subject with which the latter Member was connected, that is to say, with a motion or a Bill. I quote the words of Mr. Speaker:

"There is a definite Rule that it is not in Order for an hon. member to ask another hon. Member a Question, but there are exceptions to that Rule. It has taken
place in the past. It is not in Order for an unofficial hon. Member to ask another unofficial hon. Member a Question on general knowledge or on the merits of a particular case, but on some Question with which an hon. Member is connected, that is to say, with a Motion or Bill, it has been ruled in the past that an unofficial hon. Member is entitled to ask a Question on that subject. (vide House of Commons Debates dated July 1, 1942).

"In similar circumstances in Indian Parliament statements by Members whose conduct inside or outside the House has been referred to on the floor of the House has been permitted and it has been decided that any hon. member to whom a reference is made on the floor of the House with respect to his conduct whether inside or outside the House must have an opportunity to explain (vide H.P. Debate, 11 Mar. 1953). The same practice has been followed here in this House in a number of cases which hon. members are aware. Whether Rule 31(2) applied in terms or not, what I did was to permit Sj. Satyendra Narayan Majumdar to make a personal statement to clear up his position in respect of the unfavourable light in which he was made to appear in Sj. Basu's adjournment motion."

A question to a Minister also must relate to public affairs with which he is officially connected or to a

11 New Rule 42 of the W.B.L.A.P. Rules
(Question to private members)
matter of administration for which he is responsible.

Admissibility of Questions

The Presiding Officer has the authority to decide whether a question is admissible or not and may disallow a question if, in his opinion, it is not admissible. If a question is admitted or disallowed by the Presiding Officer, his decision cannot be challenged. There are certain rules of practice often embodied in the Rules of Procedure of Legislatures, by which the admissibility of a question is judged. A question must relate to a matter which is primarily the concern of the Union Government or the relevant State and also with which the Minister to whom the question is put is officially concerned. In the case of certain matters which are within the cognizance of the Union Government, e.g., Railways, questions are asked in the State Legislatures if they relate to matters of local interest, e.g., level crossings, accommodation in stations, etc., within the State concerned. If a question is asked of a Minister regarding a matter within the administrative responsibility of another Minister,


13 Railway Department Circular No. 447-E/21, 28 Nov. 1923.
the question is ordinarily transferred to the Minister concerned by the Secretariat of the Legislature, or as in the case of the Indian Parliament by the Ministry to which the question is put.

A question must be asked with the object of eliciting information; it must not supply any information or be put in such a way as to suggest the answer. If any facts are stated in the question, the member must take the responsibility for the accuracy of the facts stated. A question therefore cannot be put on the basis of newspaper reports. A question cannot also ask for the solution of a hypothetical proposition or the expression of opinion or interpretation of law. If the information sought is available in accessible documents or books, or in ordinary works of reference and not coming within the official knowledge or duties of the Minister, no question can be asked for such

information. A question must not relate to a matter which is pending in, or reflect on the decision of, a Court of Law. A question was asked in the House of Commons about Padola who was accused of murder pending his trial before the Court. When the time came for answering the question the Home Secretary was able to announce that a charge of murder had been made and that he did not wish to say anything which in any way might influence the course of justice. In fact the Home Secretary was implying that the case was now sub judice and that he supposed the usual rules would operate under which Members do not ask questions about such cases. The Speaker while admitting that the line between what is sub judice and what is not is sometimes difficult to draw, brought the supplementary questions to a conclusion and the matter was regarded as closed in the interest of justice. It appears that instruction was given not to accept questions dealing

with any aspect of the matter including such detail as Padola's deportation from Canada, his arrival in England and so on. Even a question which was already on the paper having been put down before the above mentioned question, was removed. A question must not relate to the character of any person except in his official and public capacity; a question which implies a charge of a personal character will be disallowed. A question must not be of excessive length. Rule 41 of the Lok Sabha Rules lays down that a question must not ordinarily exceed 150 words; a question must be couched in proper language; it must not contain any arguments, imputations, ironical expressions or abusive epithets and it must not bring in the name of any person not strictly necessary to make the question intelligible. A question should not be asked about trivial matters. A question should not repeat in substance a question which has already been answered or to which an answer has been refused.

23 May, p.360.
24 ibid.
29 May, p.361.
30 ibid. p.360.
A question cannot ask for information about matters which are in their nature secret, e.g., a decision of the Cabinet, and should not raise any matter of policy too large for being answered in a question. A question would be inadmissible:

(a) if it refers to matters relating to proceedings in a Committee which have not been placed before the House,

(b) character or conduct of any person whose conduct can only be challenged in a substantive motion,

(c) matters of past history,

(d) discourteous reference to a friendly foreign country,

(e) matters pending before a Parliamentary Committee.

(f) matters pending before Statutory Tribunals or authorities performing any judicial or quasi-judicial function or any Commission or Court of Enquiry.

In the Indian Legislatures the right to ask a question is governed by the following conditions, viz.,

(i) it shall not bring in any name or statement not

31 May, p.359.
32 See, for example, L.S. Rule 41.
strictly necessary to make the question intelligible;

(ii) if it contains a statement the member shall make himself responsible for the accuracy of the statement;

(iii) it shall not contain arguments, inferences, ironical expressions, imputations, epithets or defamatory statements;

(iv) it shall not ask for an expression of opinion or the solution of an abstract legal question or of a hypothetical proposition;

(v) it shall not ask as to the character or conduct of any person except in his official or public capacity;

(vi) it shall not ordinarily exceed 150 words;

(vii) it shall not ask relate to a matter which is not primarily the responsibility of the Government concerned;

(viii) it shall not ask about proceedings in a Committee which have not been placed before the House by a report from the Committee;

(ix) it shall not reflect on the character of conduct of any person whose conduct can only be challenged on a substantive motion;

(x) it shall not make or imply a charge of a personal character;

(xi) it shall not raise questions of policy too large to be dealt with within the limits of an answer to a question;

(xii) it shall not repeat in substance questions already answered or to which an answer has been refused;

(xiii) it shall not ask for information on trivial matters;

(xiv) it shall not ordinarily ask for information on matters of past history;

(xv) it shall not ask for information set forth in accessible documents or in ordinary works of reference;
(xvi) it shall not raise matters under the control of bodies or persons not primarily responsible to the Government concerned;

(xvii) it shall not ask for information on a matter which is under adjudication by a court of law having jurisdiction in any part of India;

(xviii) it shall not relate to a matter with which a Minister is not officially connected;

(xix) it shall not refer discourteously to a friendly foreign country;

(xx) it shall not ask for information regarding Cabinet discussions, or advice given to the Head of the State in relation to any matter in respect of which there is a constitutional statutory or conventional obligation not to disclose information;

(xxii) it shall not ordinarily ask for information on matters which are under consideration before a Parliamentary Committee; and

(xxii) it shall not ordinarily ask about matters pending before any statutory tribunal or statutory authority performing any judicial or quasi-judicial functions or any commission or court of enquiry appointed to enquire into, or investigate, any matter but may refer to matters concerned with procedure or subject or stage of enquiry, if it is not likely to prejudice the consideration of the matter by the tribunal or commission or court of enquiry.

Questions regarding Autonomous Bodies

One of the rules against admitting a question is that it must not raise any matter not under the control
or direction of Ministers but which has been delegated to other autonomous bodies. Under this rule, questions relating to statutory corporations, such as Universities, Municipal Corporations, Boards of Education, etc. are often disallowed. But in these days when statutory bodies are created for the purpose of carrying on the activities of a welfare State, some modification of the rule has been found to be necessary. Questions relating to details of day to day administration are not allowed but questions relating to matters of policy or matters over which the Ministry retains some amount of control are admitted. Sir John Anderson put the matter in a succinct way when he said:

'The extent of ministerial control should be defined as clearly as possible in the instrument constituting the authority. In regard to matters falling within the Minister's power of control, he would be liable to be questioned in Parliament in the usual way. On the other hand, in regard to all matters declared to be within the discretion of the authority, the Minister would be entitled and, indeed, bound to disclaim responsibility.'


The matter was recently considered by a Select Committee of the British House of Commons in relation to Questions about nationalised industries. The Committee in their Report say:

"The basic feature of the Parliamentary Question is that it is answered by the Minister ultimately responsible for the decisions about which he is questioned. Under their existing constitution, the Nationalised Industries are not subject to any direct control by Ministers in individual matters of detail. Your Committee therefore feel that without altering the terms of the statues under which the public corporations are constituted, which they are not empowered to recommend, Questions on matters of detail in the Nationalised Industries are inappropriate ....."

"But in the case of questions which are not obviously matters of repetition or matters of detailed administration the questions should be allowed to appear on the Order Paper and the Minister would have to answer or refuse to answer on the floor of the House." 35

Questions relating to matters over which the Government exercise some amount of control, e.g.,

questions of policy, appointments, which are subject to the approval of the Government, schemes on expenditure subject to such approval etc. would therefore be admissible:

But within the Speaker's discretion questions relating to matters of day to day administration may exceptionally be allowed, provided that in his opinion the matters are of sufficient public importance to justify this concession. 35A

In order to meet some of the difficulties which a strict application of this rule might cause, the Speaker has undertaken to allow certain questions on what might otherwise be called day to day administration provided they raised matters of urgent public importance. 36

In the House of Commons questions about the Nationalised Industries are allowed if they concern matters for which the Minister has statutory responsibility. The Minister's responsibility is broadly limited to his power to give the Board of the Industry concerned a general direction in the national interest and the power to ask for certain information. The admission of

36 May, p. 361.
Questions about nationalised industries depends (1) on the statutory responsibility of the Ministers concerned, and (2) on the application of the general rules of Questions. Questions on nationalised industries can be divided into three classes, depending on statutory responsibility in the hands of the Minister: (1) Where the statute nationalising the industry gives the Minister concerned specific duties, e.g. in nominating members of boards or approving borrowing powers, any Question on the exercise of these duties can be asked; (2) Where the statute gives the Minister concerned power to give general directions in the national interest Questions can be asked on any matter that can be the subject of such general direction, but such subject must be general and must be in the national interest; (3) Where the statute empowers the Minister to require information from the nationalised industry, the Minister would in general refuse to answer a Question on matters of day-to-day administration, so that all matters except those on which a general direction by the Minister would be applicable would be outside the field on which Questions could be asked. Questions falling into the latter category, i.e. day-to-day administration are taken up by writing to
the Minister concerned. As a result of the recent
decision of the House of Commons in Strauss Case,37
such letters may make the writers liable to proceedings
for libel. Another repercussions in England has been
a slight increase in the number of questions because
matters containing allegations previously raised in
correspondence between Members and Ministers are now
tabled as questions which are still absolutely privileged
because they constitute a 'Proceeding in Parliament'.

The Presiding Officer has further authority to
disallow any question which in his opinion shows an abuse
of the right to put question.38 If a question is
disallowed by the Presiding Officer his action cannot be
a subject of debate in the House.39

In the British Parliament, no written or public
notice of questions relating to any matter within the
jurisdiction of the Speaker is permissible on the ground
that he is not a Minister nor is his department a
Government Department. Such questions can be put to
the Speaker by private notice only.40 The same practice
is followed in India. No question relating to any matter
within the jurisdiction of the Presiding Officer, e.g.,
questions relating to the Legislature Secretariat, can be

38 House of Commons Manual of Procedure (951), p.52
40 May, p.356.
put. Any information with regard to such matters may be obtained from the Presiding Officer privately.

The Presiding Officer has the authority to have a question edited in his office if it has not been properly framed or is not couched in proper language. If a question has to be substantially altered in order to make it admissible under the rules, ordinarily the member putting the question is consulted as to whether he is agreeable to putting the question in the altered form.

Questions relating to the President's or Governor's Household

The services of members of the personal and household staff of the President or of a Governor are more or less of the nature of domestic service and the personnel stand on the same footing as other Government servants. Other staff, i.e., the Secretarial staff, are however full-fledged Government servants, i.e., their duties and pay are regulated and conditions of service determined by the Government. Whatever may be the nature of service of the two kinds of staff, the

41 May, p.355.
expenditure is met from the Consolidated Fund of the State and is charged upon the Fund.

The Legislature is not debarred from making a discussion on estimates on charged expenditure, nor such estimates are excepted from the scrutiny of the Estimates Committee. Members may require information for these purposes also.

It therefore follows that there is no bar to the asking of a question relating to the staff of the President or the Governor but this is subject to limitations. In the House of Commons questions were allowed on the expenses of the Royal Wedding.

In the House of Commons no question can be put which brings the name of the Sovereign or the influence of the Crown directly before Parliament, or which casts reflections upon the Sovereign or the Royal Family. In the rules of Procedure of Legislatures in India there is no rule relating to questions to the similar effect, but there are rules to the effect that questions shall not raise matters under the control of persons not primarily responsible to the Government concerned. This being the case only broad questions of which a Minister is supposed to have cognisance are permissible.

41(a) H.C.D.(1960),vol.622,c.4; ibid(1960-61),vol.640, c.120,(written answers to questions 16.5.1961).
Question by imprisoned member

There is nothing to prevent a member under legal detention from sending in notices of questions and those being admitted. When such questions appear on the Order Paper the rule or practice obtaining in the respective Legislature relating to questions of absent members applies. Under Lok Sabha rule, a member authorised by an absent member is permitted to ask the question standing in the name of the absent member. In almost all Legislatures similar provisions have been made and before that by the practice obtaining in India such questions were allowed to be put by any other member of the party to which the absent member belonged or by any other member.

The question, however, remains whether a member who has been convicted of an offence should be allowed to participate in the proceedings of the House. If a member is convicted and is sentenced to a term of imprisonment for not less than two years, he becomes disqualified to sit as a member of the House. If a member is convicted for a lesser term, he is not ipso facto disqualified but the House can expel him if the offence he is convicted of makes him unfit to sit as a member, e.g., an offence involving moral turpitude.
If the House expels him and his seat is declared vacant, there will be no occasion for him to put questions and any question already sent in by him will not be placed on the paper. If the House which is necessarily apprised of the imprisonment of the member, does not take any action he continues to be a member. In such circumstances, it would not be illogical to allow him to put questions which will be treated as questions of absent members. In the House of Commons, notices of questions from members under legal detention can be accepted for written answer. The same principle has been applied in the Lok Sabha. The case of a member kept in preventive detention stands on a different footing as no charge is framed in such a case. Members under preventive detention have been allowed to put questions or send notices of resolutions or amendments both in the Central and State Legislatures.

It has been held that the withholding of any correspondence from a member detained in prison to the Presiding Officer of a Legislature by the

41A May, p.363.
41B Ginnel’s case, 183 H.C.D. 539.
executive authority is not warranted, and the executive authority has no power to withhold any correspondence of a prisoner with the Presiding Officer. Such correspondence may relate to the business of the House. It would however be for the Presiding Officer or the House to decide whether a member imprisoned for committing an offence involving moral turpitude should be allowed to participate in the proceedings of the House. When correspondence from an imprisoned member to another member was withheld by the prison authorities it was held that there was no breach of privilege committed.

**Question By Suspended Member.**

Notices of questions standing in the name of a member who is suspended from the services of the House, are removed from the notice paper so long as the suspension lasts.

**Question by Member Granted Leave of Absence**

Notices of questions of a member who has been granted leave of absence under Article 101(4) or 193(4) of the Constitution of India are accepted as questions for written answers.

42 In re, Anand Nambiar A.I.R. 1952 Mad. 117
43 Fourth and Fifth Report of the Committee of Privileges (Second Lok Sabha) - Kansari Halder's Case.
Notice of Questions

The period of notice necessary for the answering of a question varies according to the rules of procedure of particular Legislatures. For example, in the Indian Parliament ten clear days' notice is necessary. In West Bengal, it is twelve days. In the Indian Parliament, however, five days must elapse after a question is sent to the Minister concerned before the question can be put down for answer for any particular day.

Number of Questions allowed to Members

Rules of all Legislatures prescribe a maximum number of questions that can be put by a member on any one day. In the Indian Parliament, the number of starred questions that a member can put on any one day is three. If any member gives notice of more than three starred questions for any particular day, those in excess of three are treated as unstarred questions. There is no limit to unstarred questions that a member can put in the Indian Parliament. In almost all Legislatures, the Lok Sabha practice is followed.

List of Questions

As has already been said, the first hour of every sitting of the Legislature is usually reserved for the
answering of questions. Under the Lok Sabha Rules, the 'first hour' is set apart for the asking of questions. It has been ruled that when part of the first hour has been spent for the administration of the oath, the time for the asking of questions cannot be extended beyond the first hour from the commencement of the sitting.\textsuperscript{45} It appears therefore that no part of the first hour may be utilised for any other kind of business. But in the Lok Sabha, an allocation of time order dispensed with the question hour on a particular day. The Speaker also ruled that the question due for answer on that day could not be transferred to any other day.\textsuperscript{46} The answers are printed like answers to questions for written answers and no supplementaries can be asked.\textsuperscript{47} In the Indian Parliament, answers are not printed for available to members before they are answered on the floor of the House. But if any answer contains any lengthy statement or information of a statistical nature, the statement is laid on the table of the House and copies of such statements are made available to members half an hour

\textsuperscript{46} H.O.P.D. 1955, vol.VII, c.12768, Part.II.
in advance of the commencement of the question hour.
In the Indian Parliament, questions are listed in three rounds, so that one member cannot have more than one question in each round. In almost all legislatures the practice of the Indian Parliament has been adopted.

**Short Notice Questions**

Questions at shorter notice can be put with the consent of the Minister concerned. The other provisions as to the admissibility, etc., regarding questions apply to short notice questions also. When a Minister agrees to answer a short notice question he indicates the day on which he would be prepared to answer. If a Minister is not agreeable to answer a question at short notice and if the Speaker is of opinion that the question is of sufficient importance to be orally answered in the House, the question may be put down for oral answer as the first question on the day when it would be due for answer after the usual period of notice.

**Manner of Putting and Answering Questions**

The usual practice is to call upon the member who has given notice of a question to put his question. The member is not, however, required to read out the question. He rises in his seat and only mentions the number of the question.

Questions of Absent Members

The rules of various Legislatures make different provisions as to what would happen if a member whose question appears in the list of questions is absent or does not put the question. The Rules of the Indian Parliament provide that the Speaker may at the request of any other member direct the answer to be given; the rules also contemplate a second round of calling upon the members who were absent during the first round to put their questions. 48a If on the second round a member is still absent, any other member if authorised by the member who gave the notice of the question may be permitted by the Speaker to put the question.

In some Legislatures, the reply to a question which has not been put or which has been withdrawn or the answer to which the member concerned does not want to be read out may nevertheless be given by the Minister with the permission of the Speaker on the ground of public interest.

Questions remaining Unanswered after Question Hour

Questions which cannot be answered on a particular day for want of time, are treated as unstarred questions and the answers are laid on the Table on that day and no oral reply can be demanded, neither can any supplementary question be asked.

Supplementary Questions

When a reply to a question has been given any member may put a supplementary question for the purpose of further elucidating any matter of fact. The supplementary questions arise out of the answers given and all the rules which apply to questions apply also to supplementaries. There is no limit to the number of supplementary questions that can be put, but the Speaker has a discretion to disallow further supplementary questions when in his opinion a sufficient number of supplementaries has been put. The report of the Select Committee on Procedure of the House of Commons has recommended that the House should generally "be prompt to support Mr. Speaker when he intervenes to curtail the number and length of supplementaries from either side of the House or when a member endeavours to use question time for the purpose of giving information rather than seeking it" and has also urged Ministers and Back benchers to be concise in their questions and answers. The following extract from May's Parliamentary Practice will show the

48(b) H.C.Paper, 92 of 1959.
scope of supplementaries:

'An answer should be confined to the points contained in the question, with such explanation only as renders the answer intelligible, though a certain latitude is permitted to Ministers of the Crown; and supplementary questions, without debate or comment, may, within due limits, be addressed to them, which are necessary for the elucidation of the answers that they have given. The Speaker has called the attention of the House to the inconvenience that arises from an excessive demand for further replies, and, to hinder the practice, he has frequently felt it necessary to call upon the Member, in whose name the next question stands upon the notice paper, to put his question, and has for the same reason asked Members not to ask supplementary questions and has suggested that lengthy answers should be circulated with the Official Report instead of being given orally. A supplementary question may refer only to the answer out of which it immediately arises, must not be read, must not refer to an earlier answer or be addressed to another Minister and is governed by the general rules of order affecting all questions.'

Although it has been observed time and again that the purpose of putting supplementaries is not to cross-examine the Minister concerned, it becomes in effect a cross-examination and it is in the use of

49 May, p.363.
supplementaries and their answers that the presence of mind, ready wit and parliamentary acumen come into full play.

**Withdrawal of Questions**

A member can withdraw a question at any time before it has been answered. A member, if the rules allow, may also ask for a postponement of his question to another day.

**Effect of Prorogation**

When a House of the Legislature is prorogued, notices of all questions lapse.

**Reply to Questions**

A Minister is not bound to answer a question and the Presiding Officer has no power to compel a Minister to answer a question or to answer it in any particular way. In the British House of Commons, a Minister is not bound to answer a question if it is not in the public interest to do so. The same practice is followed in India and Ministers answer questions unless they think that public interest would suffer by answering the question. An answer is never refused except on security grounds or because the Minister does not possess the information and

can convince the House that it is not reasonable for him to have it. If answers to questions are refused unreasonably it might lead to a feeling that the Govt. has something to conceal and the Govt. would suffer politically as a result.

Discussion

No discussion is allowed in respect of any question or answer during the question time. In the Indian Legislatures, provision is made by rules for the discussion of any matter of public importance raised by a question during a fixed period.

Importance of Questions

The importance which questions have assumed would be evident from the fact that during the first term of the Lok Sabha (1952-57), no less than 87,972 questions were put out of which the maximum figure for one year was 22,651; and during the second term from 1957 up to the budget session of 1961 no less than 1,24,379 questions were tabled out of which the maximum figure for one year was 32,686. The following passage from a publication of the Lok Sabha Secretariat would show the utility of questions in parliamentary activities:

51 Question Hour in Parliament (March, 1957).
To the members the Question Hour provides an unfailing opportunity to participate in the discussion of public affairs. Once a member's name is on the list of questions for a day he has every chance of being called without the necessity of either having to catch the Speaker's eye or solicit the patronage of the party whip. If a question is on a topic of national or international import even the back-bencher has the luck to hit the headlines in the following morning's papers. On account of this close liaison between the Question Hour and the Press, question time is utilised to the full both by the Opposition and other members.

To the Press the Question Hour furnishes never-failing material for its columns and not a few topics discussed in the Press owe their inspiration to parliamentary questions and their answers.

Far from being a source of annoyance the Ministers see in the Question Hour their daily opportunity to explain policy or acts of their administration; and many a statement of importance has been made by Ministers on national or international matters in answer to questions. It is through the Question Hour that the Government is able quickly to feel the pulse of the nation and adapt its policies and actions accordingly. Questions bring to the notice of the
Ministers many an abuse which otherwise would have gone unnoticed. Sometimes questions may lead to the appointment of a commission, a court of inquiry or even legislation when matters raised have been grave enough to agitate the public mind.