3. Human Family

-- Maya Angelou

What is the poem about?

The poem ‘Human Family’ is written by Maya Angelou, an American poet. Most of her works centre on the themes of identity, racism and family. The poem is a strong statement that all human beings are more similar than dissimilar. We all belong to one race in the world, namely, the human race. It doesn’t matter what nationality we are, what religion we follow, what language we speak or how we look. These are superficial differences which don’t exist if probed deep.

1. We all belong to one race in the world, namely, the human race. How does the poetess Maya Angelou justify this statement in the poem ‘Human Family’?

The poem ‘Human Family’ written by Maya Angelou is a plea for unity and brotherhood. She says that we may belong to different races, cultures and religions but our basic human qualities are the same. Our similarities are far more significant than our differences. We are all the members of the vast human family. It is true that there may be differences among individuals but some are serious by nature while some are humorous. People differ in their physical appearances and body complexions too. Each individual is unique piece of God. Even identical twins may differ in several aspects. However, these differences are superficial and can be ignored. The common core values that we share are far more important than these insignificant and unimportant differences. The poetess reiterates that all of us are more alike than unalike. She celebrates the basic human bond and unity among people.
2. India is a country that has many languages, religions and cultures. With reference to the ideas expressed in the poem, how do you think we stay united despite these differences?

The poem ‘Human Family’ written by Maya Angelou is a plea for unity and brotherhood. She says that we may belong to different races, cultures and religions but our basic human qualities are the same. Our similarities are far more significant than our differences. We are all the members of the vast human family. The theme of the poem can obviously be applied to the Indian context. The great land of India is the land of diversity. India has different geographical regions, states with its different languages, cultures, customs and traditions and many other distinctive features. But all share a unique bond superficially invisible. They are Indians first, next are they Kashmiris, Biharis, Andhrites or Canarians. There is something that keeps them united. That invisible and human bond and their feeling of sense of kinship are far more important than the silly and insignificant differences.

Annotations:

   1. Mirror twins are different
      Although their features jibe,
      In minor ways we differ,
      In major ways we’re the same.

Introduction: The poem ‘Human Family’ is written by Maya Angelou, an American poet. Most of her works centre on the themes of identity, racism and family. The poem is a strong statement that all human beings are more similar than dissimilar.

Context: We all belong to one race in the world, namely, the human race. It doesn’t matter what nationality we are, what religion we follow, what language we speak or how we look. These are superficial differences which don’t exist if probed deep.
Meaning: People are same in their physical appearance. Even identical twin may differ. Mirror twins, for example, despite having the most similar features, are exact reflections of each other. They may have moles or birthmarks on opposite sides of their bodies. They classified in to two types—fraternal and identical. One may be black and the other may be white. But these are all superficial and must be ignored.

Comment: The values and the basic human bond we share are far more important than these intransient differences. We are all members of the vast human family.

2. I note the obvious differences
   In the human family.
   Some of us are serious,
   Some thrive on comedy

Introduction: This is the first stanza taken from the poem ‘Human Family’ written by Maya Angelou, an Afro-American poetess. Most of her works revolve round the themes of identity, racism and family. It is a plea for unity and brotherhood.

Context: Writing about the basic human bond that keeps us united, she says these words that the superficial differences are not at all important which must be ignored for a peaceful coexistence.

Meaning: She says that we may belong to different races, cultures and religions but our basic human qualities are the same. Our similarities are far more significant than our differences. We are all the members of the vast human family. She points out some of the differences among people. Some love comedy while some other are serious. Some are white and some are black. Some strive to find the real meaning of life while some others enjoy the present moment and accept that as reality. The similarities that bind us together are stronger than our differences.

Comment: We should therefore learn to respect each other and live in peace and harmony with happy coexistence.
3. **I have seen the wonders of the world**  
   **Not yet one common man.**

**Introduction:** These lines are taken from the poem ‘Human Family’ written by Maya Angelou, an Afro-American poetess. Most of her works revolve round the themes of identity, racism and family. It is a plea for unity and brotherhood. It is a plea for unity and brotherhood.

**Context:** Writing about the basic human bond that keeps us united, she says these words that the superficial differences are not at all important which must be ignored for a peaceful coexistence.

**Meaning:** The poetess says that she has travelled to many countries. She has seen grand monuments and places of natural beauty, mysteries and marvels of the world. Then she happened to meet people of different races, religions, cultures, traditions and nationalities. But to her surprise, she found that each person was unique and quite different from the rest.

**Comment:** No two individuals were like. Differences among people are not important and should not be considered. What matters is the bond of friendship and unity among people.

4. **We are more alike, my friends,**  
   **Than we are unalike.**

**Introduction:** These are the concluding lines of the poem ‘Human Family’ written by Maya Angelou, an Afro-American poetess. Most of her works revolve round the themes of identity, racism and family. It is a plea for unity and brotherhood. It is a plea for unity and brotherhood.

**Context:** We all belong to one race in the world, namely, the human race. It doesn’t matter what nationality we are, what religion we follow, what language we speak or how we look. These are superficial differences which don’t exist if probed deep.
**Meaning:** Our similarities far more significant than our differences. She emphasizes that all human beings share a common bond. Inspite of their differences, each individual is the unique piece of God. He has a distinct personality, skin colour and physical features which are but superficial and don’t stand long.

**Comment:** The poet uses these lines as a refrain. The refrain is repeated thrice for the sake of emphasis. It is a regularly recurring melody such as the chorus of a song. It is a much repeated saying or an idea.