

Humans Values in the Mahabharata

A Presentation by Arjun Bharadwaj, G S Raghavendra, and Hari Ravikumar

Overview (AB) -- 2 minutes

> Human values are best understood through characters, so we have structured today's presentation in such a way that we will discuss some of the most important characters

> After an introduction to the poem and poet, we shall discuss the characters, and then give a conclusion.

The story we are going to tell is based on the Critical Text of the Mahabharata, prepared by VS Suktankar

> We are not telling the story but instead wish to focus on various characters and from the episodes in their lives, draw some values

> While one of us will be presenting a particular character, all of us have put our minds in preparing the material

(Perhaps good to mention that we are all students of Shatavadhani Dr. R Ganesh)

Introduction (GSR) -- 15 minutes

1. Briefly introduce the importance of the original text both quantitatively and qualitatively (quote extensively from Mahabharata itself and how later poets revere it)
2. Story of Krishna, Krishnna (Draupadi), Krishna (Arjuna) and Krishna Dvaipayana (Vyasa)
3. Along with the main thread of the story of the cousins, there are several upakhyanas in the Mahabharata that make for interesting reading
4. Give a brief intro to VS Suktankar and his lectures along with ARK's translation.
5. Emphasize on the advantages of reading Mahabharata, and how its relevance is beyond space and time.
(advantage is in reading the literature itself, no need to see anything further when the experience of reading itself gives ananda)
6. Stress on going beyond irrelevant things like science and technology, number games, etc.
7. Stress on its contribution to the development of art, architecture, music, poetry, dance, drama and all the fine arts in Indian languages.
8. The role of violence अहिंसा परंमो धर्मः धर्महिंसस्तथैव च | War has become a bad word today
War in itself is a troublesome thing but in the larger context it is both inevitable and sometimes even beneficial to give a new direction to the culture/civilization. The scientific advancement during war also has uses in the time of peace
9. The question of kshetra/bija and to whom can be the phala attributed
10. Finally end with how on an individual/personal level Mahabharata helps us in our day to day lives

Suktankar says - Vyasa is great - he has only mediocre characters - just as common men - and has built a great epic out of it. Indeed, the world is full of mediocrity - Mahabharata is a reflection of the world - Suktankar's definition of epic "it should take us to a new world" "the new world should be better than the one we live in"

We have all those qualities in us - in different shades

The human story is more important than the fantastical elements because when taken to a logical extreme, one can argue that Krishna being the Supreme being could have averted all that was evil. Then there would be no Mahabharata and we wouldn't get to read such a great work.

Verses about or in Mahabharata

महत्वात् भारवत्वात् च महाभारतमुच्यते ॥१.१.२०९॥

धर्मे चार्थे च कामे च मोक्षे च भरतर्षभं।
यदिहास्ति तदन्यत्र यत्रेहास्ति न तत् क्वचित् ॥१.६२.५३॥

विस्तरं कुरुवशस्य गाम्धार्या धर्मशीलताम्।
क्षत्तुः प्रजां धृतिं कुन्त्याः सम्यग्द्वैपायनोऽब्रवीत् ॥१.१.५९॥

वासुदेवस्य माहात्म्यं पाण्डवानां च सत्यताम्।
दौरात्म्यं धार्तराष्ट्राणामुक्तवान्भगवानृषिः ॥१.१.६०॥

दुर्योधनो मन्युमयो महाद्रुमः स्कन्धः कर्णः शकुनिस्तस्य शाखाः।
दुःशासनः पुष्पफले समृद्धे मूलं राजा धृतराष्ट्रोऽमनीषी ॥१.१.६५॥

युधिष्ठिरो धर्ममयो महाद्रुमः स्कन्धोऽर्जुनो भीमसेनोऽस्य शाखाः।
माद्रीसुतौ पुष्पफले समृद्धे मूलं कृष्णो ब्रह्म च ब्राह्मणाश्च ॥१.१.६६॥

Vyasa (GSR) -- 10 minutes

He is both the poet of the epic and a character in it. Although a participant in the evolution of the story, he is a detached observer of events. Contrast this to Valmiki where even though he is also poet and a character his role is limited and he has no personal relation with most of the characters. Vyasa on the other hand is related.

अचतुर्वदनो ब्रह्मा द्विबाहुरपरो हरिः।
अभाललोचानः शंभुः भगवान् बादरायणः ॥

* Appaya Dikshita ?

नमस्सर्विदेतस्मै व्यासाय कविवेधसे।
चक्रे पुण्यं सरस्वत्या यो वर्षभिव भारतम् ॥
बाणभट्ट हर्षचरितम्

Born as krishna dvipayana (dark and born in an island) to satyavati and parashara out of wedlock (in secret)

Grows immediately after birth and is taken away from his mother and finishes his education and becomes a sage. (Contrast with Bhishma)

Promises satyavati he'll always be there to help her in her difficult times.

He keeps his promise not just to her but continues to be helpful to even her sons and grandsons till the very end. Whenever there is some trouble he appears and try to find a solution.

Is not disturbed by his origins, his looks (which he himself describes as unflattering!) records the reactions of ambika and ambalika.

Repeatedly counsels dhritarashtra despite it's futility. Especially when duryodhana is born.
Brings propriety to the word itihaasa (it happened thus) itself by being unbiased even though the story deals with his own sons and grandsons.

Compiles and divides vedas into four parts and distributes it to four disciples Sumanta, Paika, Jaimini and Vaishampayana

Finally even he has to lament

ऊर्ध्वबाहुर्विरोम्येषा न च कश्चित् श्रुणोति माम्।
धर्मदर्थश्च कामश्च स किमर्थं न सेव्यते ॥

Whenever the Pandavas are in trouble, either Krishna or Krishna Dvaipayana comes to counsel them and give them courage.

Vyasa's words to Kunti at the end captures the spirit of the Mahabharata:

सर्वं बलवतां पथ्यं सर्वं बलवतां शुचि ।
सर्वं बलवतां धर्मः सर्वं बलवतां स्वकम् ॥१५.३८.२३॥

Vyaasa has no hesitation to tell about his own birth - that he was born out of an extra-marital affair of his mother

He even tells in the epic that his mother felt shy to tell Bheeshma that she had a son before marriage. The poet pays attention to detail

Krishna of Gokula and Mathura (AB) -- 15 minutes

Shiva is called Shambu or Soma, indicating that he is an ātmārāma, one who is peaceful within. Rama is one who is ramaṇīya, a person who is loved: An embodiment of family values. The word 'kr̄ṣṇa' is derived from 'karṣati iti kr̄ṣṇah' – that is, he is one who attracts. Apart from 'attractive, Krishna also means 'dark,' 'black.' In his very name we see a hidden aspect, an obscure element.

कारागारे प्रसूतिर्निजपितृविरतिः शैशवं गोपयोषे
राज्ञां मध्येऽपमानो विवसितवसतिः प्रत्यहं प्राणभीतिः ।
पत्नीभिस्तर्जनं च प्रकटितकलहो बन्धुषून्मत्पुत्रः
सूतोद्योगश्च मृत्युशशबरशरभवोऽप्यात्मत्रप्तिस्तवसितः ।
(R Ganesh)

लोकापोद्धेतसंभवोऽत्यवयसि प्रख्यातिरन्याहशी
पुसां मोहकराकृतिः खलकुलप्रक्षेपदीक्षाधृतिः।
दिक्षुस्मिन् पुरुषार्थतत्त्वरचनायज्ञात्मबोधाधृतिः
सचिच्चत्सुन्दरंभारतपदवी नासीत् स्मयायापिते।

(R Ganesh)

वसतीं देवः वासुदेवः - (देहाभितानं देवः)

(Gokula - temple - sand - Peacock feathers, Yamuna, Bamboo)

Rama and Krishna are both said to be avatāras of Vishnu. It is interesting to contrast their births. Rama was born during the day, in the śuklapakṣa (the fortnight of the waxing moon), during the month of Caitra, in Vasanta (spring), during uttarāyana (bright half of the year). Krishna was born at midnight, in the kṛṣṇapakṣa (the fortnight of the waning moon), during the month of Bhādrapada, during Varṣa (monsoon), in dakṣināyana (dark half of the year). Rama was born as the eldest son, in a palace, amidst so much expectation and celebrations. Krishna was born as the youngest son, in a prison cell, amidst fear and a death-threat.

While Rama was born in the morning of a bright day, Krishna was born on a stormy night. The clouds have covered the moon. Lightning typically strikes at the start of the rain but it doesn't appear when there is heavy rain. There is also no chance to light a fire with such heavy downpour. No sun, no moon, no lightning, no fire; absolutely no light.

Transported soon after birth; foils all attempts to kill him

Even from a young age, he takes responsibilities -- jumps into the water to tame Kaliya

Original mind, not bowed down by social customs. He tells his people that the Indradhvajotsava has become a vulgar display of wealth. Instead, they should do Govardhana worship. From sensual indulgence, move to gratitude for nature.

Krishna learnt things here and there, in bits and pieces. What he had was the vision and the power to grasp the underlying philosophy of things. A public figure need not be a specialist but he has to be a visionary. Deep knowledge in a subject can make someone a good teacher perhaps but not a leader, not a statesman. Krishna had grasped the underlying philosophy of various subjects. It is said that it took him only sixty-four days for him to learn everything in Saandepani's ashrama. Of course, it's impossible to learn all subjects in a matter of months, but the spirit behind that statement is simply that he was able to get to the root of the subject, the philosophy governing it rather than knowing the technical details.

Natural tendency to make friends: although Sudama was in a different class (i.e. he studied a different branch of the Veda) Krishna befriends him

Kamsa tried to get Krishna killed by sending his finest wrestlers. Krishna destroyed them. He didn't wait for Kamsa to recover from the series of shocks -- death of the washerman, death of the elephant,

death of the wrestlers, breaking of the bow in the dhanuryāga; he swiftly killed Kamsa, thus creating a powerful impact in the minds of the common people who had been harassed by their king. As soon as he created favourable public opinion, he acted immediately; he struck while the iron was hot.

मल्लानाम् अशनिः नृणां नरवरः स्त्रीणां स्मरो मूर्तिमान्
गोपानां स्वजनोऽसतां क्षितिभूजां शास्ता स्वपित्रोः शिशुः।
मृत्युर्भूजपतेर्विराङ्गविदुषां तत्त्वं परं योगिनां
वृष्णीनां परदेवतेति विदितो रङ्गं गतः साग्रजः॥

Bhāgavata Purāna 10.43.17

With the death of Kamsa, he achieved the first blow to the evil nexus of the politics of North India controlled by the likes of Jarasandha, Narakasura, Shishupala, Kalayavana, and others.

Almost single-handedly he gave deliverance to the Bhojas. The same people who hailed him as a hero and a deity were suddenly worried when Jarasandha attacked. They felt that he is the one to blame. Vikadru, one of the elders, said "At least under Kamsa's tyrannical rule, we were alive. Now we might be killed!" Public memory is always short. Krishna has to start from scratch. And so he did. He was never tired or bowed down by situations. He just went ahead.

Krishna of the Gita (HRK) -- 25 minutes

Most later poets and artists have focussed on Krishna's life from birth until teenage. After his killing of Kamsa and becoming actively involved in the politics of Northern India, his life is not the subject of art. There are several works describing the childhood antics of Krishna as well as his teenage romances. However, shockingly little has been written about his life as a strategist and statesman. [Shishupalavadham is an exception, but the poet loses the forest for the trees and spends a lot of time in varnana and doesn't even touch the core of the premise]

As a raw teenager, raised in a village, he comes to the capital and kills Kamsa. Immediately he sends a warning to Dhritarashtra saying, *Your brother's widow and his children are returning from the Śatasrīga mountain. Take good care of them. Don't be unjust to them in your mad love for your son!*

How Krishna manipulates the politics of North India by first striking at Kamsa.

Kamsa (Mathura) | Duryodhana (Hastinavati) | Narakasura (Pragjyotishpura) | Jarasandha (Magadha) | Paundraka Vasudeva (Vanga) | Srigalava Vasudeva (Kavivirapura) | Rukmi (Vidarbha) | Shishupala (Chedi) | Vinda-Anuvinda (Avanti) | Kalayavana (Northeast) | Shakuni (Gandhara) | Jayadratha (Sindhu, Sauvira) | Karna (Anga) | Kashiraja (Kashi) | Kichaka (Matsya) | Kakotaka Gonanda (Kashmira) | Shalya (Madra)

Kamsa, Narakasura, Shishupala, etc. → Krishna | Rukmi → Krishna marries Rukmini, humiliates Rukmi, who later dies at the hands of Balarama | Kalayavana → Muchukunda
Jarasandha, Kichaka, Duryodhana → Bhima | Jayadratha, Karnā → Arjuna

Krishna says in BG: "यामिमां पुच्छितां वाचं प्रवदन्त्यविपश्चितः। वेदवादरताः पार्थ नान्यदस्तीति वादिनः॥" Vyasa documents the words of a youngster who even condemned blind adherence to Vedas... the very Vedas which Vyasa had mastered and reorganised into four parts. These words would have hurt a conservatist.

Krishna is not merely an arm-chair philosopher. Whatever krishna says to श्रीगुरु is not something which he hasn't practiced in his own life. Example he had to kill Kamsa who was his relative and later he also had to kill his own people yadavas.

It is a duty of a क्षत्रिय to protect the helpless and punish the wicked. This awareness of क्षत्रिय has been clearly spelled out by our ancient thinkers and philosophers. Sanātana Dharma emphasizes the harmony between ब्रह्मा and क्षत्रिय. While the former is spiritual, pertaining to learning and intellect, the latter is physical, pertaining to courage and protection. All our deities—gods and goddesses—adorn themselves with a flower or an ornament or a musical instrument as well as weapons of war. Our deities have a charming poetic side and an awe-inspiring warring side

There is a notion among some of our people—ancient and modern—that Krishna is a cheat, a fraudster, a master of deceit. Nothing could be further from the truth. The ancient thinkers have always held that a person who is strong, wise, and unselfish—he or she can resort to any means. If one has the authority and the courage; if one is learned and adheres to dharma; and if one is free from all personal agenda, then whatever that person does becomes correct. That person will never err. Krishna was such a person.

सक्ताः कर्मण्यविद्वांसो यथा कुर्वन्ति भारत।

कुर्यात् विद्वांस्तथासक्तः चिकीर्षुर्लक्षितसङ्ग्रहम्॥ is what he himself says in the Gita

Political situation in North India at the time of Draupadi Svayamvara:

पाण्डवा are all thought to be dead along with their mother कुर्ती. कौरवा have consolidated their position with the armies of शकुनि king of गान्धार, जयद्रत king of Sindhu and Sauvira, कर्ण king of अङ्ग who is dearest to द्वर्योधन with भीष्म द्रोण कृष्ण अश्वत्थाम and 100 brothers in their ranks. Even though नरकासुर and पौण्ड्रक are killed, जरासंध is still strong in magadha with support of शिशुपाल in चेदि and भगदत्त son of नरकासुर. They are most likely to be allies of कौरवा. बाह्लिक, the brother of शन्तनु also an ally of जरासंध with his son सीमदत्त and grandson भूरीश्वरस् is also very likely to side with the कौरवा. The पाण्डवा seems to have comparatively less support. All they can count on are the small armies of शत्य of मद्रदेश due to him being the maternal uncle of नकुल and सहदेव and perhaps of विराट of मत्स्यदेश (although the country is being practically run by कीचिक). The kingdom of द्वारक even though an ally as कुर्ती is the sister of वसुदेव, are geographically separated by the sea and aren't playing a central role in the mainland polities. While द्वारक has excellent individual warriors like कृष्ण, बलराम, सात्यकी, कृतवर्मन् etc they don't have a standing army large enough to take on the combined might of the opposition in the gangetic plain. द्रुपद being humiliated by द्रोण has vowed revenge and has got a daughter द्रोपदी fit to be wife of his vanquisher अर्जुन and a son दृष्टदयम् to kill द्रोण. He also has in his ranks शिखण्डी who is destined to kill भीष्म.

Krishna makes an appearance.

Other than विदुर, कृष्ण is perhaps the only person who knows पाण्डवा are alive. He also has gauged the individual strengths and weakness of पाण्डवा even before seeing them in person and knows that the brothers seems to be the only worthy option to rule भरतवर्ष. In this situation krishna sees that it is apt that द्रोपदी marries अर्जुन and पाण्डवा get a powerful ally in द्रुपद so that it will not be easy for कौरवा to

brush their claim with scant regards. To ensure that, he deliberately forbids participation of all यादव warriors in द्रौपदीस्वयंवर. It would have taken a lot of political will to do that without giving away the secret about the पाण्डव, that too when people like जरासंध शत्र्यु etc who are as old as कृष्ण's grandfather/father take part in the स्वयंवर.

After अर्जुन disguised as a brahmin wins द्रौपदी a melee ensues as all the क्षत्रिय humiliated threaten to kill अर्जुन and create pandemonium. Again krishna takes a firm stance, chides all of them for not being able to prove their worthiness and only can play spoilsport, bring the situation under control!

सर्वभूताशयः स्थितः आत्मा अहम् - Address of Krishna!

In the Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna to stand up and fight. Klaibyam ma sma gamah... and kutastva kashamalamidam... the very first words he utters are those of courage.

Arjuna's loss of heart is because he has to kill his own people. He has fought with the same people earlier (uttaragrahana) but the stakes were not so high. Also, this is some sort of temporary insanity. Krishna instills confidence in Arjuna using the wisdom that he has realized in his own life -- both based on study and his experiences.

Krishna of the Gita is a statesman, a philosopher, a teacher, a friend, and also a Supreme being. Perhaps the real vishwaroopa-darshana of Krishna is the various roles he plays in the epic! At various points of time, he takes up the activities of people of different varnas.

Krishna with reference to the larger story of the epic (GSR) - 20 minutes

When we undertake something at the level of society, the result will be beneficial to some but will also be harmful to some. A few will look at it as a success but there will also be a few who look at it as a failure. This is the difficulty in Krishna's life. Without assuming any position, without hijacking any seat of power, he tried to help people of all stations as much as possible. He did what is best for the world.

One has to be really careful before setting out to be a leader of the people. Often, it is better to be a supporter or a nourisher of a good leader of society. Krishna never became king. He supported good kings in every way he could. He embodies goodness in society. At every stage he tried to protect the welfare of the common people; he worked for universal well-being.

Krishna is a great example for how a person with a vision for society and a desire to serve the world cannot be troubled by family affairs and personal emotions

Another trait that is essential for a public figure is the attitude to immediately revolt against injustice. A person can sustain in public life only if he or she has such a mindset. A public figure cannot sit silently when adharma raises its ugly head. He cannot be a leader if he remains silent owing to some formality, courtesy, or a sense of magnanimity. Krishna never remained silent in the face of injustice. He always fought adharma. It didn't matter who the other person was.

There are several instances in the epic when Krishna has called out the mistakes of different people. He calls out the mistakes of Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra and also those of Yudhistira and Arjuna. But he has never proclaimed that a certain society or a certain people are evil. The reason being that society doesn't have its own identity. It behaves in the way that the people behave at that place and at that time.

Krishna used sama-dana-bheda-danda in the Mahabharata war. First, peaceful words. Then, offering to take just five villages. Then demoralizing Bhishma, Drona + telling Karna the truth. Then finally war. In spite of knowing that there will be warfare, he tried.

Krishna's first appearance

Krishna's role in सुभद्राहरण, killing of जरासंध, राजसूय and killing of शिशुपाल, the burning of खाण्डक
Absence during the game of dice and the consequences

Krishna's promise to द्रौपदी during exile

The training of अभिमन्यु

Deliberations after 13 years

Krishna, the messenger, meeting विदुर and कर्ण
त्यजेदेकं कुलस्यार्थं ग्रामस्यार्थं कुलं त्यजेत् ॥
ग्रामं जनफदस्यार्थं आत्मार्थं पृथिवीं त्यजेत् ॥

Krishna or the नारायणीसेना

Krishna, the charioteer

During the reign of भीष्म द्रोण कर्ण शत्रुघ्नि as the commanders

The killing of दुर्योधन return of बलराम and aftermath

Saving परीक्षित

गान्धारी's curse

During अश्वमेध

Destruction of the यादव clan

The (ordinary) end.

The early characters (AB) -- 20 minutes

Shantanu
Satyavati
Vichitravirya, Chitrangada
Amba, Ambika, Ambalika

Shantanu - falls for Ganga. Agrees to all the conditions she puts ... He wants her, but is losing the children ... if he wants a child, he will lose her
"Prajaayai gruhamedhinaam" - but for his blind love for Ganga, he had to sacrifice his children

Ambaa - commits suicide with the pledge to come back and revenge

The elders (GSR) -- 20 minutes

Bhishma -- Shikandi [Kuru] Drona, Drupada [Dristadyumna] Kripa, Shalya
Birth and the famous vow:

His greatest mistake:

Adherence to the vow:

Tutor to sons:

Mistake repeated

The Pandavas and kauravas:

Kripa and his relationship, recruiting Drona

Drona's background and friendship with Drupada

Penury followed by humiliation from his dear friend

Training of the princes

Parallels between drona and dhritarashtra when it comes to blind love for their progeny.

The show of prowess

Gurudakshina/Drupada's humiliation

Birth of Dristadyumna and his training

Role of Bhishma, Drona, Kripa in sabha parva and the question of Draupadi on Dharma.

Role in Udyoga parva

Shalya's mistake

Bhishma parva

Drona parva

Shalya as karna's charioteer and as commander

Bhishma's death

The brothers (HRK) -- 15 minutes

Pandu → Great hero; how he deals with the fact that he is not able to father children -- takes to austerity: Life at the cost of no intercourse; neither enjoyment nor offspring

Kunti → Pillar of strength, Strong female character; her advice द्रौपद्याः पदवीं चर followed by यदर्थ क्षत्रिया सूते तस्य कालोऽस्म आगतः (reminder to her children through Krishna during the time of Krishnasandhana)

Madri → More beautiful, also more selfish perhaps; however, she volunteers to die with Pandu: she tells Kunti that she cannot care for Dharma, Bhima, and Arjuna like how she (Kunti) would care for Nakula, Sahadeva (and how this is prophetic in a way when Kunti tells Draupadi to take special care of Sahadeva)

[Rare example of sati; Satyavati, Ambika, Ambalika, and others are just widows; they don't become satis]

Dhritarashtra → Blind physically, also mentally blind to his son's faults. Unhappy about Pandu getting the throne. Malicious fellow but still has attachment for his brother's children. Forever in dharma-sankata. Terrible situation to be in. Unable to see, unable to trust others, unable to detach from others (e.g. from Vidura). In fact he doesn't want to see the war when Vyasa offers him divine vision. He says he does not want to see the Pandavas dying. Instead he asks Sanjaya to tell him the story.

More than wanting to be dharmic, he wants to be seen as dharmic. He has no problem to the lakshagriha strategy as long as people don't get a whiff of it!

The dyuta-anudyuta parva exposes his enjoyment at the fall of the Pandavas. Vidura plays the role of his conscience-keeper but rather unsuccessfully.

Gandhari → Strong lady, willing to close her eyes forever because husband is blind;

Sanjaya → Good-hearted but charioteer of Dhritarashtra: minor character

Vidura → Sole voice of reason in the villain camp. Kicked about but inextricably connected with the Kauravas. To the best of his abilities, he helps the Pandavas. He is not seen as a strict "Kaurava" - Krishna stays in his house during the peace-talks. He too technically belongs to the enemy camp but he is not seen like that.

A wonderful example of what a person can do with limited abilities, limited resources, and limited freedom provided one has the strong framework of dharma.

Vidura says this to dhritarashtra but he due to his love for sons doesn't kill duryodhana and hence all 100 sons live

एकेन कुरु वै क्षेमं कुलस्य जगतस्तथा।
त्यजेदेकं कुलस्यार्थं ग्रामस्यार्थं कुलं त्यजेत्॥ 1-129-82
ग्रामं जनपदस्यार्थं आत्मार्थं धृथिवीं त्यजेत्।
स तथा विदुरेणोक्तस्तैश्च सर्वैर्द्विजोत्तमैः॥ 1-129-83
ततः पुत्रशतं पूर्णं धृतराष्ट्रस्य पार्थिवां॥ 1-129-84

Note about the relationship between Dhritarashtra and Vidura. Such a complicated relationship created by Vyasa here!

Vidura plays a very important role in saving the Pandavas from the house of lac. Vidura while being a messenger to dharma-rajā while inviting to the dvata he cautions him about the ulterior motives of duryodhana and shakuni but couldn't persuade him not to come. Later he also protests during the disrobing of Draupadi, cautions dhritarashtra repeatedly to throw duryodhana into jail and take adequate steps to avert the war during the peace mission of krishna

The heroes (x8) -- 25 minutes

Yudhistira
Bhima
Arjuna
Nakula, Sahadeva
Draupadi

Yudhishthira - only theory - no practise
His is roopa-brahmanya ... not svaroopa brahmanya
He becomes handicapped without Bheema and Arjuna

Yudhishthira - When Duryodhana is hiding in the Vaishampayana Sarovāra, Yudhishthira tells him to come out and choose any one of the brothers to fight with, with any weapon he likes

किमिद दयूतमारब्धं पुनरेवं पथ्य पुरा - he is gambling again?

In addition to this, he has even taken the pratijnaa that he will die if any one of his brothers die! What if Duryodhana had chosen Nakul or Sahadeva!

His addiction to gambling is his biggest weakness. Incidentally he learns to play well during incognito which doesn't help!!

Yudhistira's is a kind of Abhaava-vairaagya ...
He is neither holding on to Pravritti or going to Nivrtti

He fell down by a few inches because he uttered a lie - Ashvatthamo hatah naro vA kunjaraH
While it indicates that he morally fell down, what about pawning his wife in gamble?

Yudhisthira becomes very judgemental in the Svargaarohana parva.

Dharmaraaja is conforms to form - he is a 'formist'. He does not see the svaroopa .. only roopanishtaa... he does not have the broader vision - sublime spirit

imitating the form is easy, imitation/adherence to the content (svaroopa) comes with maturity

कर्मभिः वर्णतां गतम् -in Ajagaropakhyaana :
ब्रह्मिदं जगत्

Yaksha-prashna -> Dharmaraaja's theoretical knowledge comes of use here.
All the brothers have fainted - they wanted water first and then would pay heed to the warning... but Dharmaraaja listens to the word of the Yaksha

Kaa vartaa?

अहन्यहनि भूतानि गच्छन्ति यमनिरम् ।
शेषा जीवितुमिच्छन्ति किमाश्वर्यमतः परम् ॥

अहन्यहनि भूतानि प्रविशन्ति यमालंयम् ।
शेषाः स्थावरमिच्छन्ति किमाश्वर्यमतः परम् ॥

(अज्ञेयो ग्रन्थिनो वराः)

Bheema -

Bheema is rustic ... does not have taste for fine arts: he is not a basika ... but a hard-worker
He is for quantity, less for quality and skill

Bheema is purely practical ... less theoretical
He is an open book
No regrets for anything!

Most natural and rustic person... no takeness: he can never be silent or composed ...he cannot be a sanyasi

Epitome of confidence

He was ready to give his life for Draupadi

Draupadi had gratitude for Bheema's care for her ... but not the romantic feeling

He reciprocated and felt for her pains ... but probably not for her romance ...

Carries - 4 brothers, mother to escape from the lac house. They would have fallen asleep before he gets them water in his uttareeyaa.

Kumaravyasa says దైకుముదు బలునేదరే లెదరెయనే న్యాకుహను

For the first time, Bheema cries to see his brothers and mother in that condition. He does not lament for himself, but for the others

When the Sougandhikaa flower for the first time attracts Draupadi, she first thinks of Arjuna. But Arjuna is gone to Indraloka ... she then asks Bheema...

Shows that Draupadi's heart was always with Arjuna. For Bheema, going to fetch a flower was like going for a war ! He brought so many flowers that he could not carry them himself.

Arjuna would have made a garland out of the flowers, or a bouquet maybe ...

Krishna would have even braided her hair (jaDe) and

For him. Hidimbaa was the most suitable wife

या विन्त्यामि सततं मयि सा विरक्ता।

साप्यन्यमिच्छति जनं स जनोऽन्यसक्तः।

अस्मल्कृते च परितुष्टति काचिदन्या।

धिक् तां च तं च मदनं च इमां च मां च॥ (applies to Bheema specifically)

Brings a heap of Sougandhikaa flowers! Not like Arjuna ... Arjuna would have brought one flower, with lot of affection, etc

Bhima doesn't seem to understand the notion of tactical retreat and biding time. Episode of narayanastraproyoga of ashwathama illustrates this when he stubbornly refuse to bow before that and krishna and arjuna drag him away and forcefully make him bow.

Bhima also behaves badly with dhritarashtra after the war where he repeatedly reminds who killed all his sons and mocks him, which he shouldn't have.

We can't spend free time with Bheema - there is nothing to exchange

While he seem to excel in brute force and seems like a machine with no sympathy even he exhibits such qualities now and then example during meeting ghatotkacha he is willing to sacrifice himself instead of a brahmana couple (He can feel for the common man)

Duryodhana pats his thigh when Draupadi is being dragged by Dusshaasana to the court

Dharmaraaja went to the forest, hiding his face behind his hands

Bheema goes patting, caressing his biceps and thighs

Arjuna went throwing sand around
Nakul and Sahadeva smeared themselves with ash-sand
Draupadi went in the guise of a widow, with her hair and saree dripping wet

The Kauravas sent Pandavas for 12 years to the forest hoping that they will never come back (and will get eaten up by animals in the forest/ fall for natural calamity). Also, their rights over the kingdom will get expired in 12 years, as per the Dharmashastra of the Dvapara-yuga.
Even if they survive the 12 years, 1 year of Ajnaata-vaasa - they had to give up their weapons too ...
They will lose practise and be powerless

Dr. SLB's portrayal of Bheema and Arjuna
Bheema - goes into the war, hits them all with mace ... thinks Arjuna is coward
Arjuna - Bheema is like an animal, no strategy, no skill

Arjuna
Careerist,
Arjunam prathamam vande, geetaayaaH hetubhUtam

Arjuna - Ekalavya episode
Drona asks Ekalavya to give him his right thumb as Guru-dakshinaa. Instead, he could have called Arjuna and Ekalavya for one on one competition and proved his calibre. Neither the student nor the teacher care for ethics
Arjuna wants to be the best always ... goes to the extent of killing a hunter's career.

Arjuna is a combination of practise and theory, but lacks sublimity
Krishna has theory, practise and sublimity
Vidura has theory and sublimity

Dharmaraaja - should be kept at a safe distance
Bheema - does not have raasikya
Arjuna - escapes when there is calamity

Sahadeva - is contemplative, anatarmukhi, strong in his opinions, does not heed for obligations
Nakula - naya, soujanya, bahirmukhi.
Nakula is a combination of Yudhisthira and Arjuna.
Sahadeva - Dharmaraaja and Bheema combination
Nakula and Sahadeva are poles apart
Bheema and Yudhisthira are poles apart
Arjuna is the via-media (middle path) between all of them

Also need to cover the important question of how Arjuna was affected with self doubts and resulted in Bhagavadgita.

Draupadi seeing duryodhana during rajasuya and laughing at him actually doesn't happen. So also forbidding karna's participation in swayamvara. So for no fault of hers she is subjected to humiliation.

Draupadi satyabhama samvada vanaparva sarga 222-225

केन द्रौपदि वृत्तेन पाण्डवानुपतिष्ठसि
लोकपालोपमान् वीरान् यूनः परमसंमतान्
कथं च वशगास्तुभ्यं न कुप्यन्ति च ते शुभे

तव वश्याहि सततं पाण्डवाः पर्यदर्शने
मुखप्रेक्षाश्रु ते सर्वे तत्त्वमेतद्वीहि मे

द्रतचर्या तपो वापि स्नानमन्त्रौषधानि वा
विद्या वीर्यं मूलवीर्यं जपहोमस्तथागदाः

ममाचक्ष्व पाञ्चालि यशस्यं भग वेदनम्
येन कृष्णे भवेन्नित्यं मम कृष्णो वशानुगः 3.222.4-7

कष्टेनैव हि कल्याणि

The villains (HRK) -- 20 minutes

In a way, the villainy starts with Dhritarashtra. Up to that point, we have a variety of characters, none of whom are malicious, be it Bhishma or Satyavati's father or Amba or her sisters.

In some way, it is but natural that his house becomes the adda of the vilest of people in the Mahabharata -- the notorious dushta-chatushtaya (Shakuni, Duryodhana, Dusshasana, and Karna) along with Ashwatthama, the son of Drona.

SHAKUNI

Shakuni hails from Gandhara, the northwest frontier, a land that has been constantly ravaged due to its strategic location. By nature, he is a strategist and willing to put personal preferences over principles and universal welfare. He chugs along with Gandhari at the time of her wedding and soon becomes a powerful and negative influence on his nephews. At some level, he is the master puppeteer matching his wits against Krishna, who holds the reins on the other side. Whenever the Pandavas are in trouble, Krishna is their go to person. For the Kauravas, it was Shakuni.

Shakuni has a strong feeling that his sister was cheated into marrying a blind fool. Gandhari herself seems to have no major bitterness regarding her marriage. [Some men just like to watch the world burn D]

Shakuni is a good example of a brilliant mind, teeming with ideas and strategies, ability to make use of situations, etc. but lacking dharma. Evil genius.

DURYODHANA

Duryodhana has no achievements of his own. But had a very keen understanding of who are the useful idiots and when they can be useful.

मध्यस्थः सततं भीष्मो द्रोणपुत्रो मयिस्थितः।
यतः पुत्रस्ततो द्रोणो भविता नात्र संशयः ॥१.१३०.०१६॥

कृपः शारद्वतश्वैव यत एते त्रयस्ततः ।
द्रोणं च भागिनेयं च न स त्यक्षति कर्हिचित् ॥१.१३०.०१७॥

क्षत्तार्थबद्धस्त्वस्माकं प्रच्छन्नं तु यतःपरे ।
न वैकःस समर्थोऽस्मान् पाण्डवार्थं प्रबाधितुम् ॥१.१३०.०१८॥

स विश्रब्धः पाण्डुपुत्रान्सह मात्रा निवासय ।
वारणावतमद्यैव नात्र दोषो भविष्यति ॥१.१३०.०१९॥

Duryodhana is also the textbook definition of AtatAyin:

अग्निधो गरलश्वैव शस्त्रपाणिर्धनापह । ॥
क्षेत्रदाराहरश्वैव षडैते ह्याततायिनः ॥

- 1 Using arson to kill enemies [varanavrata - lakshagriha]
- 2 using poison [bhima]
- 3 using weapons on unarmed [abhimanyu]
- 4 coveting their wealth [pandavas at Indraprastha]
- 5 coveting their land [pandavas]
- 6 coveting their wives [eye on draupadi]

Ajuna says foolishly in BG: पापमेवाश्रयेदस्मान् हत्वैतानाततायिनः!!

Duryodhana epitomizes jealousy. He has no redeeming quality. What the Pandavas, particularly Bhima, do to the Kauravas in childish enthusiasm, Duryodhana retaliates with the vilest possible response. He poisons Bhima, he tries to have the Pandavas killed in the lakshagriha.

He is so sadistic that even after taking everything away from pandavas he sends durvasa so that he will curse them. Then he plans along with karna Goshayatra with the sole reason of seeing their misery. Even after he is rescued from the Gandharvas by Arjuna and Bhima, he only thinks of boosting himself up by performing the Vaishnava Mahayajna.

Duryodhana's governance is based on populism, doling out money and emptying the treasury.

DUSSHASANA

Poor man's Duryodhana; shadow of his elder brother. Fellow thief and villain. In contrast with Dusshasana, Duryodhana appears great.

ASHWATTHAMA

Ashwatthama is like North Korea, a rogue nation with access to nuclear weapons but does not deserve such technology. He uses two most powerful weapons narayanastra and brahmashura/aishika callously, without caring about the consequences. Many stupid concoctions saying he told kumaravyasa the story of mahabharata or he is destined to be vyasa in future yugas neither does justice to the talent of kumaravyasa nor the reputation of vyasa.

KARNA

Fascinating character. Just as he is born, Kunti puts him in a casket and sets him afloat on the river. Just as the waves of the water carry the resplendent Karna, his life too would be, in a similar manner, filled with ups and downs, restless, unsteady, and shaking all the time.

Karna is a villain but has a few redeeming qualities. For some reason, people seem to have magnified the few good qualities that he has and forgotten all about his wicked words and acts.

Karna's virtuosity has to be countered by citing his actions in Adi during lakshaagriha episode, dyuta and anudyuta parvas, goshayatra etc. In dyuta and anudyuta parvas, he is the one who does all the talking and humiliates draupadi again and again. While dusshasana does things in action he does everything by words. (refer kumaravyasa's karna pushpavatiyaadode phalavatiyaagu)

Since he is always portrayed to be wronged by destiny or fate contrast his life with Vidura who also seems to have come from a lower caste but his actions lead him to a different path. Similarly, Krishna also grows up in adverse conditions socially when compared to his royal lineage. Contrast Krishna discovering about real parents at teenage vs. Karna discovering in his sixties.

The so-called friendship of Karna and Duryodhana; it is a relationship of convenience. Also, "daana veera" Karna is mostly doling out money given to him by Duryodhana. Real daana is giving away what one has earned with great effort. That said, it is indeed noble of Karna to give away his kavacha to Indra, knowing that he is Indra. It turns out to be a fatal mistake for the war. Time and again we find the dangers of all these pratijnas -- be it Karna's pratijna that he won't say no to people or Dharma's pratijna that he won't refuse an invitation for dice. All such generalized oaths are against dharma, which is by default dynamic.

Karna is also hailed as the greatest archer, far more talented than arjuna, etc but the evidence in the Mahabharata runs counter to it. We see this in the uttara-gograhanaparva clearly (Remember that Arjuna is coming to the battlefield after about a year of being in the dancing halls of the Matsya kingdom. No practice with bow and arrow for one whole year! And yet he single-handedly defeats the Kaurava army!). Also, in some of the direct encounters during the MB war, Arjuna proves to be stronger. In the Ghoshayatra parva, Arjuna easily defeats the Gandharvas who have thrashed Karna. Karna is a good warrior, trained under Parashurama, but surely not the best!

The minor characters (GSR) -- 15 minutes

Virata, Kichaka, Uttara

Virata is an able warrior and courageous enough to venture into protecting his cows knowing fully well that kauravas are in full strength but not farsighted enough to think different possibilities. But he is also afraid of kichaka and doesn't seem to have guts to stop him when he chases draupadi

Kichaka even though an able warrior is a womanizer and doesn't seem to listen good counsel from his sister. Meets his ghastly end from bhima. Draupadi seems to have no respite from wicked men duryodhana followed by jayadratha and then kichaka.

Uttara kumara has become the proverbial coward and topic of jokes when it comes to boasting. He boast so much but runs away when he sees the fierce warriors on the battlefield. But not many know that he finally redeems himself during the kurukshetra war by fighting with and getting killed by Bhishma.

Jayadratha -- Abhimanyu

Abhimanyu is the best disciple of krishna but seems to fail in strategy. Even though he knew his weakness he willingly enters chakravyuha, once he enters he doesn't seem to have half measures and repeatedly thrashes everyone multiple times before failing due to the deceit and the collective might of the enemies.

Jayadratha is the villain on the same day, takes his revenge on pandavas and uses the boon he had obtained from shiva. Then is killed by Arjuna the next day.

Ekalavya

appears in just 29 verses critical edition mahabharata 1.123.10-39

Balarama, Satyaki, Kritavarma

Balarama being brother of Krishna undergoes the same difficulties during his childhood and youth but somehow picks up bad company and ends up being a drunkard with no impact on the main story of mahabharata. He adopts the "middle ground" by not fighting the war. Great example of when you don't align yourself with the good, you are invariably on the side of evil.

Vikarna, Yuyutsu

Comparable to kumbhakarna and vibhishana in limited ways

Vikarna questions duryodhana and karna during dyuta but finally fights on their side

Vikarna is killed by bhima and may be the only killing bhima shows an iota of regret

Yuyutsu switches sides one among the 11 who survives the war

Conclusion (AB) -- 10 minutes

Quote from Kshemendra's bharatamanjari

रत्नोदारचतुर्स्समुदरशनां भुक्त्वा भुवं कौरवो
भग्नोऽपतितस्स निष्परिजनो जीवन्वृक्तेभक्षितः।
गोपैर्विश्वजयी जितस्स विजयः कक्षैः क्षिता वृष्णयः
तस्माल्सर्वमिदं विचार्य सुचिरं शान्त्ये मनो दीप्ताम्॥

[The Kaurava, i.e., Duryodhana who ruled the land between the four oceans, fell down with a broken thigh; with nobody beside him, he was eaten by wolves even as he was alive: the world conqueror Arjuna was defeated by a few cowherds and *Vṛṣnis* destroyed each other; therefore, contemplate on this deeply and give your mind to peace.]

Reference Materials.

Shebawadham Dr. R Ganesh Lecture

KM Murthy

SL Bhajeappa

AR Krishna Shastri

C Rajagopalachari

LS Sheshayya Rao

Akona Chitra Fatha

From Comments -

Dhritarashtra

Dhritarashtra is offered divine eyes before the war, but says he does not want to see the Pandavas dying

Kunti

her advice द्रौपद्याः पदवीं चर followed by यदर्थं क्षत्रिया सूते तस्य कालोऽयं आगतः

The political situation of the भारतवर्ष at the start of द्रौपदीस्वयंवर

पाण्डवा are all thought to be dead along with their mother कुन्ती. कौरवा have consolidated their position with the armies of शकुनि king of गाम्धार, जयद्रत king of सिन्धू, कर्ण king of अङ्ग who is dearest to दुर्योधन with भीष्म द्रोण कृपा अश्वत्थाम and 100 brothers in their ranks. Even though नरकासुर and पौण्ड्रक are killed, जरासंध is still strong in magadha with support of शिशुपाल in चेदि, भगदत्त son of नरकासुर. They are most likely to be allies of कौरवा. बाहिक brother of शन्तनु also an ally of जरासंध with his son सोमदत्त and grandson भूरीश्रवस् is also very likely to side कौरवा. The पाण्डवा seems to have comparatively less support. All they can count on are the small armies of शल्य of मद्रदेश due to him being the maternal uncle of नकुल and सहदेव followed by विराट of मत्स्यदेश (even there they need to be wary of कीचक). The kingdom of द्वारक even though an ally as कुन्ती is the sister of वसुदेव, they are geographically separated by the sea and aren't playing a central role in the mainland politics. While द्वारक has excellent individual warriors like कृष्ण, बलराम, सात्यकी, कृतवर्मन् etc they don't have a standing army large enough to take on the combined might of the opposition in the gangetic plain. द्रुपद being humiliated by द्रोण has vowed revenge and has got a daughter द्रौपदी fit to be wife of his vanquisher अर्जुन and a son दृष्टद्युम्न to kill द्रोण. He also has in his ranks शिखण्डी who is destined to kill भीष्म.

VS Sukhtankar

Vyaasa is great - he has only mediocre characters - just as common men - and has built a great epic out of it. Indeed, the world is full of mediocrity.... Mahaabhaarata is a reflection of the world

his definition of epic "it should takes us to a new world" "the new world should be better than the one we live in"

pratijnaa

This seems to be cancer in the clan of kurus. taking unreasonable vows right from bhishma

Ambika, Ambalika

finally they are lead by Vyasa to vanaprastha before pandavas and kauravas grow up saying that they have already seen enough and they have to retire