



**UNCOMMON  
GROUND:  
DIALOGUES WITH  
BUSINESS AND  
SOCIAL LEADERS**

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and a desire to both talk and listen.

On the corporate side, Mukesh Ambani, arguably the most powerful businessman in the country would have to be on the show. So would Anand Mahindra and Sunil Mittal, icons of the new economy.

For the corporate heads, going on my show was a dicey proposition. They would have to voluntarily enter a lion's den. And many of these lions are known to roar loudly. In spite of my repeated assurances that this was not going to be a fight but a dialogue, it was definitely going to be tough for them to go on national television with NGOs known for raising fundamental and potentially awkward questions.

I have to admit I used the camaraderie of our Davos days to approach Mukesh Ambani, Anand Mahindra, Yogi Deveshwar, Uday Kotak, M.S. (Vindi) Banga, Rahul Bajaj and Sunil Mittal. I believe it was their indulgence and perhaps also their regard for Nandan which made them agree so readily. Mukesh magnanimously said he would record the show whenever I wanted. Anand was a bit cautious when I said he would

before we can converse beyond them. For social sector leaders, who have often had cause to point out the wrong doings of both the government and business, would a cozy dialogue be seen as a sign of weakness, of being co-opted?

To their credit, after giving it some thought, and in some cases, after consulting their colleagues, as part of the inner democracy in their organizations, they all agreed. To me, it was imperative that Medha Patkar, Sunita Narain, Mirai Chatterjee and Aruna Roy be part of the series. These are women I have long admired for years of selfless work for social justice. My morale was boosted when they not just agreed but quite kindly added that what I was trying was a good thing. They affirmed the real need for such platforms for dialogue. You cannot imagine the relief I felt. It took me some time to find Dr Suman Sahai, who was travelling, but when I explained the concept of the show, she took me at my word. Vijay Mahajan, Dr R.K. Pachauri and Dinesh Mohan were my other guests from the social sector. But the three of them have had many occasions to talk and work with the corporate sector and so it was less difficult for them to say yes. But I am, nevertheless, very grateful that they quickly consented and gave me dates, despite their hectic schedules.

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