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ET Women's Forum: No finance degree, no guru. Take a SIP of confidence, start walk to freedom

Synopsis

At The Economic Times Women's Forum, experts emphasized that financial independence empowers women to control their lives. The discussion highlighted the need for increased financial literacy, challenging societal norms, and encouraging women to actively participate in investment decisions. Speakers advocated for starting small, diversifying investments, and promoting female role models in finance to drive lasting change.



Being financially independent is not just about having money, it's about having control over your life. That was the central theme of a thought-provoking discussion held at The Economic Times Women's Forum in Mumbai. The panel, titled '[Financial Independence](#): Own Your Worth,' brought together three influential voices, Devina Mehra, founder of First Global, Nilesh Shah,

managing director of Kotak Mahindra AMC, and Rachana Ranade, finance educator and well-known YouTuber.

Mehra opened the session by stressing the importance of introducing [financial literacy](#) in school curricula. While awareness has grown over the last three decades, she noted that young boys are often exposed to financial discussions earlier than girls, who typically begin engaging in it only after starting a job or marriage. She underlined how women themselves develop mental blocks due to social conditioning, often underestimating their capability or deferring to male family members.

Shah pointed out that a meaningful change will take time and must be driven both by shifting mindsets and greater participation from women. "Women need to ask questions, make decisions, and claim their space in money conversations," he said.

Ranade cited a story from Nashik, where even men are starting to understand the importance of including their wives in financial discussions. She highlighted how [financial empowerment](#) is

not just a women's issue but a collective responsibility.

The panel agreed that risk-taking is not inherently gendered. Mehra explained how women, though great savers, hesitate to invest due to fear or lack of confidence despite evidence showing women often outperform men in investing.

Both Mehra and Shah advocated starting with [systematic investment plans \(SIPs\)](#) to build discipline and gradually gain confidence. "You don't need to know everything to start investing," Mehra said. "Just begin wisely and consistently."

Ranade, who commands a wide audience on social media, spoke about the transformative power of digital platforms in driving financial awareness. While her early YouTube channel had a 90:10 male-to-female ratio, she has since narrowed the gap with her Marathi channel reaching 35% female viewership.

She recalled how her videos inspired a small village in Maharashtra, where women began investing even ₹100 through SIPs. "This is the ripple effect," she said. "Even one small step can spark big change."

When the conversation moved to risk-taking, Mehra said that women often go to extremes. They either stay away from investments completely or leave all decisions to someone else. The smarter approach, she said, is balanced asset allocation, a mix of equity, debt, and even global exposure.

"Never be 100% in equity," she warned, adding that diversification is important for long-term financial health.

Ranade encouraged women to take small steps to begin their investment journey. She said starting a monthly SIP of even ₹500 can be a great beginning. "You don't need a finance degree to begin," she said.

Based on her YouTube experience, she noted that women tend to engage more with financial content when it comes from someone relatable, especially another woman. That's why role models are so important.

Mehra also said that more women are needed in top finance roles. For women starting businesses, she advised them to confidently pitch their ventures and not let doubts, especially from others, slow them down. "Be ready to steer the narrative back to your strengths," she said. "A man will apply for a promotion if he meets 60% of the criteria. A woman waits till she checks every box," Mehra observed. She also shed light on systemic biases in venture capital funding, where men are asked about growth potential and women about risks.

"Be a great salesperson for your idea. You will face more rejections, but don't take them personally." The session closed with a strong message: financial independence is not optional, it's essential.