"If you are a techie, your home page should be GitHub, not Instagram"

Vinit Shahdeo, a *software engineer* at *Postman*, has been contributing to many open source projects since his college days. In an exclusive interaction with *Sreejani Bhattacharyya* of *OSFY*, Shahdeo talks about his many contributions to OSS and how newbies starting out can build a career in this domain.

Vinit Shahdeo

Vinit Shahdeo's love for open source began during his college days at Vellore Institute of Technology (VIT). Currently, he works as a software engineer at Postman. He was introduced to GitHub in 2016 when he joined VinnovateIT, an innovation lab at VIT. He found it so interesting that GitHub soon became his home page and he started contributing to open source.

A range of projects, including one for COVID-19

Shahdeo's first project on GitHub was a basic calculator that computed just the square and cube of a number. He says, "Initially, I used to push my college course projects and a few of the personal projects that I built while learning different Web development skills, onto GitHub. Later, I started maintaining CodeChef's VIT Chapter and the VinnovateIT organisation on GitHub, where we did a few group projects. After that I started contributing to different open source organisations in every possible way."

Shahdeo soon started addressing issues, contributing to the codebase, reviewing others' code, and improving documentation. Today, he spends a lot of time on GitHub. Shahdeo says that he currently maintains a project that is a part of many open source programs

like GirlScript Summer of Code and Rails Girls Summer of Code. He also conducts webinars and workshops to help students kick-start their open source journey.

After the pandemic hit us, Shahdeo built a COVID-19 tracker which gives you access to coronavirus related stats in a more convenient way. All the information is displayed statewise, and it is very easy and quick to stay up-to-date via the graphs.

Other than that, Shahdeo is also working on an IoT based project that helps to monitor the water level in a tank and even alerts users in case of an overflow or water depletion. Shahdeo adds, "This product aims to save natural resources effectively. The vision for this project is to provide a system for society to overcome water related problems in cities. Water is perhaps the second most important substance on the Earth, after air. This system helps the user to keep a track of the water filling up in the tanks placed on the terrace. "

Shadeo says this project is actually a part of GirlScript Summer of Code 2020 and Rails Girls Summer of Code 2020. While the contributors considered this as a project, this is really an initiative to help address the pressing need of the hour, which is to conserve water, he adds.

The lure of open source

When asked what got him hooked to open source, he says, "My charitable inclination, coupled with a passion for what I am doing, inspires me to work with open source. I am addicted to the green dots on GitHub. Others stalk people on Facebook; I stalk them on GitHub. I get amazed and inspired by the work of open source contributors. Even beginners' projects inspire me a lot as their first chapters often seem better than mine."

When he mentored over 100 students to create their first-ever pull request on GitHub, total strangers approached him and asked him about how he built some specific project.

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The initial hurdles

It has not always been smooth sailing for Shahdeo, though, as he has encountered many challenges as well. He tells us that open source is like an ocean. There are more than 20 million public repositories hosted online on GitHub. He says, "Earlier, it was difficult for me to find a beginner's repo to contribute to; there are repositories that lack proper README.md and I used to get stuck due to the lack of documentation provided there."

In spite of this challenge, Shahdeo used to push his code on GitHub. But he felt that his repositories were not receiving attention. He was sure that someone could benefit from his contributions, some day.

Getting familiar with the existing codebase was a bit difficult in the initial days. However, there are many beginner-friendly projects that help absolute beginners to create their first-ever pull request.

Move out of the classroom

Shahdeo says that sticking to only the classroom and self-learning is very limiting. People consider GitHub and the OSS world as something related to only techies. But actually, anyone irrespective of their domain, can contribute to the open source space. He adds, "The contribution can vary from improving a typo in the documentation to writing some

piece of code. I believe that the Indian government should start an initiative in open source like the Smart India Hackathon to engage engineering college students to solve the real-world problems that our individual ministries are looking for solutions to."

What kind of advice does this young techie have for people starting out in this field. Shahdeo says that reading others' codebase every day will help one to learn more. He adds, "The open source community is awesome. People will notice your work – the forks/stars on your repo will show that your work is being appreciated. Getting appreciation for the code you write will drive you to write more and more code."

Shahdeo says that GitHub is a home for the code-blooded. It facilitates social coding by providing a Web interface to the Git repository and management tools for collaboration. GitHub allows one's work to get out in front of the public.

He adds that it is important to create and maintain one's profile and repository of work. Even a very simple project should be put on GitHub. Someone may benefit from it. He states, "Never compare your first chapter with someone's last chapter. Your first repository can even contain a code to check if a number is even or odd. In the future, your digital footprint will carry more weightage than your resume. GitHub is the best place where aspiring software engineers can build their portfolio."

Shahdeo also says that he has noticed that many repositories do not have proper documentation. Documentation is key. Having a proper README.md always makes the project look better. He also advises people to take part in open source competitions like Hacktoberfest, GirlScript Summer of Code, GSoC, RGSoC etc. Shahdeo concludes by asking readers to" … maintain a streak on GitHub as you maintain one in SnapChat. Get addicted to the green dots on GitHub. Participate in competitions, connect with developers and learn from everyone." END