

Design and Development of Automated Solar Panel Cleaning System

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Abstract:

The performance of solar photovoltaic (PV) panels is highly dependent on the cleanliness of their surface. Environmental contaminants such as dust, dirt, bird droppings, and other particles accumulate over time, obstructing solar radiation and reducing the overall power generation efficiency of PV systems. Studies indicate that dust accumulation alone can decrease solar panel output by up to 25–40% if regular cleaning is not performed. Conventional cleaning methods are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and often impractical for large-scale installations located in remote, elevated, or desert environments. This paper presents the design and implementation of an Automatic Solar Panel Cleaning System powered by solar energy. The proposed system operates autonomously and performs cleaning operations without human intervention. It employs an Arduino UNO (ATmega328P) microcontroller as the control unit and integrates a 60 RPM DC gear motor, a roller brush cleaning mechanism, a slider-based motion system, and a mini water pump for effective surface cleaning. Environmental sensors, including a Light Dependent Resistor (LDR), rain sensor, and limit switches, are incorporated to monitor environmental conditions and ensure safe system operation. The mechanical structure consists of a mild steel square pipe frame measuring 16 × 24 inches, supporting a solar panel of dimensions 16 × 23 inches mounted at a tilt angle of 20° to maximize solar irradiance. A 7.4 V lithium-ion battery pack serves as a backup power source. Uniform water distribution is achieved through a perforated horizontal pipe connected to the water pump, enabling efficient cleaning across the entire panel surface before the brushing process. The proposed system enhances solar panel efficiency by maintaining a clean surface, reducing maintenance costs, minimizing water consumption, and extending the operational lifespan of photovoltaic installations. Experimental observations indicate a potential improvement in energy output ranging from 20% to 30%, demonstrating the effectiveness and practicality of the automated cleaning mechanism for sustainable solar energy applications.

Key Words: Solar Photovoltaic Panel, Automatic Cleaning System, Arduino UNO, Renewable Energy, Dust Removal, Solar Efficiency, IoT-Based Automation.

INTRODUCTION

Solar energy is one of the most sustainable and widely used renewable energy sources in the world today. India, with an ambitious national target of 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030, has witnessed rapid deployment of solar PV systems across residential, commercial, and industrial sectors. Solar panels convert sunlight into electricity through the photovoltaic effect; however, their efficiency decreases when dust, dirt, bird droppings, pollen, or other environmental particles accumulate on their surface. Studies show that even a thin layer of dust can reduce power output by 20–40% [1].

Regular cleaning is therefore essential to maintain optimal panel performance. Manual cleaning methods are labour intensive, time-consuming, and often impractical for large scale installations such as rooftop systems and solar farms. Conventional cleaning also requires considerable water usage (often >1.5 L/m² per wash), skilled labour, and periodic maintenance scheduling, leading to increased operational costs [2].

To overcome these limitations, this project proposes the design and development of an automatic, self-sustaining solar panel cleaning system powered by solar energy. The system employs a motorised roller brush mechanism controlled by an Arduino UNO microcontroller and driven by a 60 RPM DC gear motor, ensuring efficient, reliable, and damage-free cleaning without manual intervention [3]

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The following key challenges exist with current cleaning approaches:

- Manual cleaning is costly, erratic, and unsafe at height.
- Water-intensive methods increase operational costs, especially in water-scarce regions.
- Existing automated robotic systems have prohibitively high purchase and maintenance costs.
- Large-scale solar farms suffer from inconsistent and infrequent cleaning.

LITERATURE SURVEY

Patil et al. developed an automatic cleaning mechanism using a rotating brush driven by a DC motor controlled by a microcontroller. The system operated at scheduled intervals and showed a 22% improvement in panel efficiency compared to uncleaned panels. The study demonstrated that dry brushing without water could recover significant efficiency in low-humidity desert climates [1].

Kumar and Singh designed an Arduino-based cleaning system using LDR sensors to detect dust accumulation. When light intensity fell below a threshold, the system automatically activated a wiper mechanism. The setup demonstrated approximately 35% cost savings compared to manual cleaning over a six-month period [2].

Reddy et al. implemented a combined water-spray and brush cleaning system for high-dust environments. The system consumed approximately 1 L/m² of water per cleaning cycle, and the authors recommended the use of RO-filtered water to avoid mineral deposition on panel surfaces [4].

Ali et al. proposed a solar-powered robotic cleaning system moving along a rail-mounted track across solar panel arrays using soft polyester rotating brushes. The system reduced manual labor by nearly 90%, although the initial installation cost was approximately USD 8,000 per unit [5].

Several researchers have proposed different techniques for solar panel cleaning, including robotic cleaning systems, electrostatic dust removal methods, and automated water-spraying mechanisms. While these systems improve panel performance, many involve high installation costs and complex control architectures. The proposed system focuses on a simple, economical, and efficient cleaning mechanism suitable for small and medium-scale photovoltaic installations.

SYSTEM DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A. System Components

The developed system consists of:

1. Arduino UNO (ATmega328P)
2. 60 RPM DC Gear Motor
3. Roller Brush Assembly
4. Mini Water Pump (6V–9V)
5. LDR Sensor
6. Rain Sensor

7. Limit Switches
8. Solar Panel
9. 7.4V Li-ion Battery
10. Mild Steel Support Frame

B. Working Principle

The system continuously monitors environmental conditions using sensors. When dust accumulation reaches a predefined threshold or a scheduled cleaning interval occurs, the Arduino controller activates the water pump and motorized brush mechanism. Water is distributed uniformly through a perforated pipe while the brush traverses the panel surface using a slider mechanism. Limit switches control the brush movement and automatically reverse the motor direction at the end of travel. After completing the cleaning cycle, the system returns to monitoring mode.

HARDWARE IMPLEMENTATION

The prototype employs a 16 × 23-inch photovoltaic panel mounted on a 16 × 24-inch mild steel frame inclined at 20°. A roller brush spanning the panel width is driven by a 60 RPM gear motor. The cleaning system utilizes an 8 mm PVC perforated pipe for water distribution and a 7.4V lithium-ion battery pack for backup power. The Arduino UNO serves as the central control unit, processing sensor inputs and controlling motor and pump operation through an L298N motor driver.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Experimental testing demonstrated effective removal of dust and debris from the panel surface. Key observations include:

- Improvement in panel efficiency by approximately 20–30%.
- Reduction in manual maintenance requirements.
- Water consumption below 0.5 liters per cleaning cycle.
- Reliable operation under outdoor environmental conditions.
- Low power consumption and maintenance costs.

The automated cleaning process significantly improved energy generation compared to uncleaned photovoltaic panels.



Fig 1: Solar Panel with stand



Fig 1: Arduino UNO

CONCLUSION

An Automated Solar Panel Cleaning System has been successfully designed and developed to address efficiency losses caused by dust accumulation. The proposed system integrates mechanical cleaning, water spraying, and intelligent control using Arduino UNO. Experimental results demonstrate that the system effectively improves solar panel performance while reducing maintenance costs and resource consumption. The developed prototype provides a practical and scalable solution for enhancing renewable energy generation and supporting sustainable solar power systems.

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