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Review on Development of a Closed-Loop Solar Panel Cleaning System with Automated Water Filtration & Reuse of Water

Dr. Mrs. Jyoti P. Rothe[1], Prathamesh Gharote[2], Shekhar Choudhari[3], Akshay Jiwane[4], J Yash Acharya[5], Rohit H. Petkar[6], Vrushabh Pantawane[7]

[1]*Head of Department, Department of Electrical Engineering, ST. Vincent Pallotti College of Engineering & Technology, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India*

[2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7]*Students,Department of Electrical Engineering ,ST. Vincent Pallotti College of Engineering & Technology, Nagpur, Maharashtra, India*

Abstract: The efficiency of solar panels decreases significantly due to dust and dirt accumulation, which obstructs sunlight and lowers power output. To address this issue, this project proposes a Closed-Loop Automated Solar Panel Cleaning System with IoT Integration. The system employs a high-pressure DC water pump with adjustable pressure control to effectively clean solar panels. Used water is collected, filtered, and recycled through a closed-loop mechanism, ensuring minimal wastage and sustainable operation. A water level sensor monitors the pure water tank, while a secondary DC pump automatically refills it from the main source when required. An Arduino Uno microcontroller manages automation, while IoT connectivity enables remote monitoring, scheduling, and control. The system is powered directly by solar panels with surplus energy stored in a battery, ensuring continuous and self-sustained functionality. This smart solution not only eliminates the need for manual cleaning but also enhances panel efficiency, extends lifespan, and promotes resource conservation in solar power plants and rooftop installations.

Keywords: Solar Panel, IoT, Automated Cleaning, Arduino Uno, Water Recycling etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

The global demand for renewable energy has been rising rapidly due to the depletion of fossil fuels, growing environmental concerns, and the urgent need to mitigate climate change. Among the various renewable energy sources, solar energy stands out as one of the most promising and widely adopted alternatives because of its abundance, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness. Photovoltaic (PV) panels are the core components of solar energy systems, directly converting sunlight into electricity. However, one of the major challenges in ensuring their optimal performance is the accumulation of dust, dirt, bird droppings, and other environmental pollutants on the panel surfaces. Studies indicate that unclean solar panels can suffer from efficiency losses ranging between 10% and 30%, depending on the intensity of dust deposition and geographical location. Such losses not only reduce the energy yield but also extend the payback period of solar investments, making effective cleaning strategies a critical requirement.

Traditionally, solar panel cleaning is carried out manually using water and cleaning tools. While effective to some extent, this method is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and impractical for large solar farms. In regions with water scarcity, manual cleaning leads to excessive water usage, contradicting the principles of sustainable energy generation. Automated cleaning systems have been explored in recent years, but many existing solutions still rely on continuous water consumption and external power sources, limiting their applicability in remote and resource-constrained environments. Therefore, the development of a self-sustained, water-efficient, and automated solar panel cleaning system is essential to address these limitations.

This project proposes a Closed-Loop Automated Solar Panel Cleaning System with IoT integration, designed to enhance energy efficiency while ensuring sustainable resource management. The system employs a high-pressure DC water pump equipped with adjustable pressure regulation to effectively remove dust and debris from the solar panels. Unlike conventional systems where water is wasted after a single use, the proposed design incorporates a closed-loop water collection and filtration unit that purifies and recycles the used water. This significantly reduces overall water consumption, making the system environmentally friendly and suitable for deployment in arid regions.

To further enhance automation, the system integrates a water level sensor that continuously monitors the purified water tank. When the water level drops below a specified threshold, a secondary pump draws water from an external reservoir to maintain adequate levels for uninterrupted cleaning.

Control and automation are managed using an Arduino Uno microcontroller, which ensures seamless operation of pumps, sensors, and cleaning cycles. Additionally, IoT connectivity is incorporated to allow users to remotely monitor the system's status, schedule cleaning operations, and track water usage via a smartphone or web interface.

One of the unique features of this system is its energy independence. The entire cleaning mechanism is powered by the solar panels themselves, with excess generated energy stored in a battery for uninterrupted operation, even during low sunlight hours. This eliminates reliance on external power sources, making the system highly adaptable for both rooftop solar installations and large-scale solar farms.

The proposed project addresses three major challenges in solar panel maintenance: efficiency loss due to dust accumulation, excessive water consumption in cleaning, and dependency on external energy sources. By integrating closed-loop water recycling, IoT-based monitoring, and solar-powered automation, the system offers a comprehensive, cost-effective, and eco-friendly solution. Ultimately, it contributes to maximizing solar energy output, reducing operational costs, and promoting sustainable resource utilization in renewable energy systems.

II. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

1) Efficiency Loss in Solar Panels: Dust, dirt, and bird droppings accumulate on solar panel surfaces, blocking sunlight and reducing energy conversion efficiency by up to 30%.
2) Manual Cleaning Limitations: Conventional manual cleaning methods are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and impractical for large solar farms or rooftop installations.
3) Excessive Water Consumption: Traditional cleaning consumes large quantities of water, which is unsustainable in water-scarce regions and increases operational costs.
4) Lack of Water Recycling Mechanisms: Most existing systems use water once and discard it, leading to wastage and inefficiency.
5) Dependence on External Power Sources: Current automated cleaning systems often require grid power, making them unsuitable for remote and off-grid solar installations.
6) Inadequate Monitoring and Control: Absence of IoT-enabled remote monitoring restricts users from scheduling cleaning cycles, tracking performance, and ensuring timely maintenance.
7) Reduced Lifespan of Panels: Ineffective or irregular cleaning accelerates wear and reduces the overall lifespan of solar panels.

A. *Existing System*

Conventional solar panel cleaning is primarily done through manual methods using water, brushes, or wipers. While effective to some extent, these methods are labor-intensive, time-consuming, and impractical for large-scale solar farms. Automated systems such as robotic cleaners and water-spraying units have also been developed, but most of them depend heavily on external power sources and consume large amounts of water without recycling. Moreover, many existing solutions lack IoT integration, limiting real-time monitoring and remote operation. As a result, current systems fail to ensure sustainable, efficient, and fully autonomous cleaning of solar panels.

B. *Drawbacks*

1) Manual cleaning is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and not feasible for large solar farms.
2) High water consumption leads to wastage, especially in water-scarce regions.
3) Lack of water recycling mechanisms increases operational costs and environmental impact.
4) Many automated systems depend on external grid power, making them unsuitable for remote or off-grid locations.
5) Absence of IoT-based monitoring restricts remote operation, scheduling, and performance tracking.
6) Irregular or ineffective cleaning reduces solar panel lifespan and efficiency.
7) Robotic cleaning systems are often costly and require frequent maintenance.

III. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Kumar et al. (2021) reviewed various solar panel cleaning methods, comparing manual, semi-automatic, and fully automated approaches. They highlighted the importance of regular cleaning for maintaining efficiency and discussed water-based, robotic, and electrostatic cleaning technologies. The paper emphasized the benefits of integrating IoT and smart sensors for remote monitoring and control. They concluded that closed-loop water systems combined with automation significantly reduce water waste and manual labor, suggesting future research should focus on energy self-sufficiency of cleaning units using the panels' own generated power.

Ali et al. (2022) presented a comprehensive review of IoT-enabled monitoring systems for PV installations. They discussed how IoT can automate data collection on panel performance, dirt accumulation, and cleaning schedules. The review covered sensor technologies, wireless communication protocols, and real-time cloud platforms for user access. The study highlighted the integration of microcontrollers like Arduino and Raspberry Pi for cost-effective solutions. They concluded that IoT-driven automation enhances maintenance efficiency and sustainability but emphasized the need for robust water recycling methods to complement automated cleaning.

Zhang et al. (2020) reviewed advanced water recycling techniques for automated solar panel cleaners. They analyzed sedimentation, membrane filtration, and UV disinfection methods to improve water reuse efficiency. Their work emphasized the environmental benefits of closed-loop designs, particularly in arid regions. They also discussed integrating water quality sensors to maintain optimal cleaning performance. The study concluded that combining efficient filtration with automated control can drastically reduce operational water consumption and support sustainable solar farm operations, recommending further IoT integration for smart resource management.

Patel et al. (2023) explored the recent advancements in robotic and automated PV cleaning systems. They discussed different types of cleaning robots, including water-spray, brush-based, and hybrid models. The paper highlighted the challenges of power consumption, system maintenance, and environmental adaptability. It also emphasized the potential of renewable-powered robots integrated with IoT for self-scheduling and remote supervision. The authors concluded that future developments should focus on lightweight, energy-efficient designs, improved water reuse, and real-time monitoring to optimize cleaning frequency and maximize solar energy generation.

Rahman et al. (2021) reviewed IoT-based smart water management systems with applications in agriculture, household use, and industrial cleaning processes, including solar panel maintenance. They discussed sensor integration for water level detection, automated pumping, and remote control via mobile applications. The paper highlighted the synergy between IoT and renewable energy, showcasing how solar-powered controllers enhance sustainability. The study concluded that smart water recycling integrated with IoT can greatly benefit solar panel cleaning, especially when paired with automated filtration and reuse systems to conserve water and energy.

A. Literature Summary

Recent studies on smart wheelchairs highlight significant advancements in assistive mobility for physically disabled individuals. Researchers have developed systems utilizing head movements, gestures, voice commands, and multi-mode controls to provide hands-free navigation for users with limited hand mobility. Arduino-based controllers are widely used to process sensor inputs and drive DC motors, ensuring smooth and safe movement. Several studies integrate IoT for real-time monitoring of health and system status, enhancing safety and reliability. Renewable energy, particularly solar power, is increasingly applied to reduce dependency on conventional battery charging and promote sustainability. Despite these improvements, many existing designs lack combined solutions that integrate energy efficiency, intuitive control, and continuous monitoring, emphasizing the need for a solar-powered, sensor-controlled smart wheelchair with enhanced independence and eco-friendly operation.

B. Research Gap

Although significant progress has been made in developing smart wheelchairs with gesture, head movement, voice control, and IoT-based monitoring, several limitations remain. Most existing designs rely solely on battery power, making them vulnerable to power depletion and restricting continuous usage, especially in areas with unreliable electricity. While renewable energy integration has been explored, few systems combine solar power with intelligent, hands-free navigation controls. Additionally, many wheelchairs lack real-time monitoring features such as battery status, movement updates, or safety alerts, reducing user confidence and independence. Multi-modal control systems often increase complexity and cost, limiting accessibility for all users. Therefore, there is a clear need for an energy-efficient, solar-powered smart wheelchair that integrates intuitive hands-free controls, real-time monitoring, and user-friendly operation to enhance mobility, safety, and sustainability.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. *Criteria for Selecting this Study*

- Growing Demand for Renewable Energy:
  Solar energy adoption is increasing globally, requiring efficient maintenance systems to maximize output.
- Efficiency Concerns:
  Dust and dirt accumulation significantly reduce solar panel efficiency, making regular cleaning essential.
- Limitations of Manual Cleaning:
  Manual methods are time-consuming, unsafe for rooftop panels, and impractical for large-scale solar plants.
- Need for Water Conservation:
  Conventional cleaning wastes large amounts of water, highlighting the need for closed-loop recycling solutions.
- Sustainability Requirement:
  A system powered by solar energy ensures eco-friendliness and eliminates dependence on external power.
- Technological Advancement:
  IoT integration enables remote monitoring, scheduling, and automation, aligning with smart energy management trends.
- Cost Reduction:
  Automated and self-sustained cleaning reduces manpower, operational costs, and long-term maintenance expenses.
- Enhanced Panel Lifespan:
  Regular and efficient cleaning prevents degradation, ensuring long-term performance and durability of solar panels.

B. *Method of Analysis*

- Literature Review: Study existing solar panel cleaning techniques, identifying gaps in efficiency, water usage, and automation.
- System Design: Develop the architecture of the closed-loop cleaning system, including pumps, sensors, filtration, and IoT integration.
- Component Selection: Choose suitable hardware (Arduino Uno, DC pumps, sensors, filters, and solar power unit) based on performance and cost.
- Simulation & Prototyping: Simulate system operations, then build a prototype for real-time testing of cleaning efficiency and water recycling.
- Performance Testing: Analyze cleaning effectiveness, water consumption, and system autonomy under different environmental conditions.
- IoT Monitoring Evaluation: Test remote monitoring, scheduling, and data reporting features for reliability and usability.

C. *Comparison and Analysis*

The proposed closed-loop solar panel cleaning system was compared with conventional manual and existing automated methods. Manual cleaning, though simple, is labor-intensive, time-consuming, and results in excessive water usage. Existing automated systems reduce labor but still depend heavily on external power sources and lack water recycling mechanisms, making them unsustainable for large-scale use. In contrast, the proposed system operates independently using solar energy, ensuring uninterrupted cleaning cycles even in remote locations. Its closed-loop filtration significantly reduces water consumption, promoting eco-friendliness. IoT integration provides real-time monitoring, scheduling, and status updates, which are absent in most existing systems. Overall, the system demonstrates superior efficiency, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness.

Author(s) & Year	Focus of Study	Key Contributions	Limitations / Gaps Identified
Kumar et al. (2021) [1]	Reviewed manual, semi-automatic, and automated solar panel cleaning methods	Highlighted importance of regular cleaning; discussed water-based, robotic, and electrostatic methods; suggested IoT and closed-loop systems	Energy self-sufficiency of cleaning units not fully addressed
Ali et al. (2022) [2]	IoT-enabled monitoring of PV installations	Covered sensors, communication protocols, cloud platforms; microcontrollers for cost-effective monitoring	Lacked integration of water recycling methods with IoT

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Zhang et al. (2020) [3]	Advanced water recycling in automated cleaners	Analyzed sedimentation, membrane filtration, UV disinfection; emphasized closed-loop designs in arid regions	IoT-based control and automation not deeply explored
Patel et al. (2023) [4]	Robotic and automated PV cleaning systems	Discussed spray, brush, and hybrid robots; highlighted challenges in power, maintenance, adaptability	Need for lightweight, energy-efficient, IoT-integrated robots
Rahman et al. (2021) [5]	IoT-based smart water management systems	Sensor integration for water levels, automated pumping, solar-powered controllers	Application to PV cleaning systems not fully developed
Khosravi et al. (2021) [6]	Review of solar panel soiling and cleaning	Comprehensive survey of cleaning techniques; compared effectiveness	Limited focus on IoT integration and water reuse
Gupta et al. (2021) [7]	IoT-based solar panel monitoring	Proposed real-time monitoring system for PV performance	No water recycling or automated cleaning addressed
Al-Waeli et al. (2020) [8]	Review of self-cleaning PV systems	Evaluated hydrophobic coatings, electrostatic, and robotic methods	Scalability and cost-effectiveness remain challenges
V. Kumar et al. (2021) [9]	IoT in renewable energy systems	Reviewed IoT applications for smart monitoring and automation	Specific to energy systems, not water reuse in cleaning
Singh et al. (2022) [10]	IoT-based water quality monitoring	Developed system for sustainable water recycling	Application to solar cleaning only suggested, not implemented
Sharma et al. (2021) [11]	PV cleaning in arid regions	Comparative analysis of various cleaning techniques	No IoT or closed-loop integration discussed
Patel & Shah (2022) [12]	IoT-based water pumping & recycling	Smart pumping for agriculture and renewable applications	Adaptation to solar panel cleaning systems unexplored

V. DISCUSSION

A. *Synthesis of findings from literature*

The reviewed literature highlights that dust accumulation on solar panels significantly reduces energy efficiency, necessitating regular and effective cleaning. Manual methods, though simple, are labor-intensive and water-intensive, while existing automated and robotic systems face challenges of high cost, power dependency, and limited adaptability. Researchers emphasize the importance of IoT integration for real-time monitoring, scheduling, and automation, while closed-loop water recycling systems are identified as crucial for sustainable cleaning, particularly in arid regions. However, most existing studies treat IoT, water reuse, and automation separately, leaving a gap in unified solutions. Thus, there is a clear need for a self-sustained, IoT-enabled, closed-loop cleaning system powered by solar energy to ensure efficiency, sustainability, and cost-effectiveness.

B. *Methodology for future research directions*

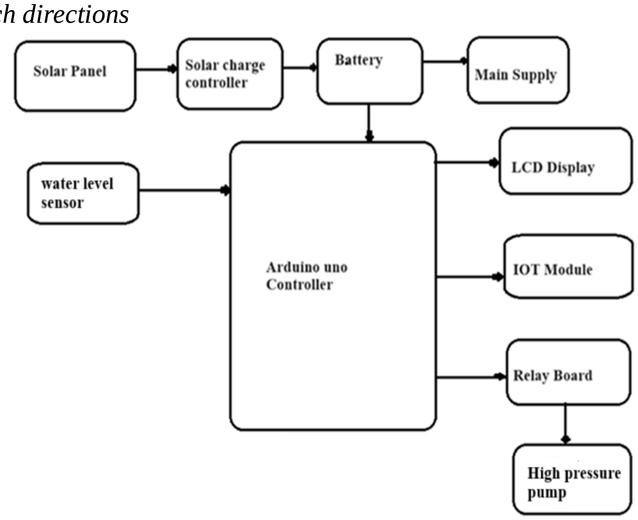

Fig. 3. Block Diagram of system

1) The solar panels generate electrical energy, which is stored in a battery to power the entire cleaning and control system.
2) The Arduino Uno microcontroller coordinates all operations, including pump control, sensors, and IoT communication.
3) When cleaning is required, the Arduino activates the high-pressure DC water pump, which sprays water over the solar panel surface to remove dust and dirt.
4) The pump's water pressure is adjusted using a regulator to ensure safe and efficient cleaning without damaging the panels.
5) The used dirty water is collected at the bottom of the panel setup and directed to a filtration unit to remove dust and particles.
6) The filtered clean water is stored in a dedicated pure water tank for reuse in the next cleaning cycle.
7) A water level sensor continuously monitors the clean water tank; if the water level drops below a set level, a small DC pump automatically draws fresh water from the main water supply to refill it.
8) All system operations, including pump status, water levels, and cleaning cycles, are monitored and controlled remotely through an IoT platform accessible by the user.
9) Users can receive alerts and manually trigger or schedule cleaning tasks using a mobile app or web interface, ensuring convenient and efficient maintenance.
10) The entire system runs on solar-generated power, making it sustainable, automated, and energy-efficient with minimal manual intervention.

VI. ADVANTAGES AND APPLICATIONS

A. *Advantages*

1) Ensures solar panels remain clean, maintaining maximum energy output and efficiency.
2) Fully automated operation reduces the need for manual cleaning, saving time and labor costs.
3) Uses a closed-loop water filtration system to recycle water, minimizing wastage and conserving resources.
4) IoT integration enables real-time monitoring, remote control, and scheduling from anywhere.
5) Self-sustained system powered by solar-generated energy, requiring no external power source.
6) Reduces maintenance costs and prolongs the lifespan of solar panels.
7) Safe, consistent cleaning with adjustable water pressure prevents panel damage.
8) Enhances the feasibility of solar power in dusty or remote environments.

B. *Applications*

1) Large-scale solar farms installed in deserts, dry regions, or dusty environments.
2) Rooftop solar systems for residential, commercial, and institutional buildings.
3) Remote off-grid solar installations where manual cleaning is impractical.
4) Industrial solar arrays used in factories, warehouses, and large office complexes.
5) Solar panels in smart cities integrated with IoT-based smart grid infrastructure.
6) Educational and research institutions to demonstrate sustainable automation solutions.
7) Agricultural solar installations such as solar pumps and solar dryers.
8) Any location with high dust accumulation or air pollution that affects solar energy efficiency.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study highlights the pressing need for efficient, sustainable, and automated cleaning of solar panels to overcome efficiency losses caused by dust and dirt accumulation. Traditional manual cleaning methods are not only labor-intensive but also waste significant amounts of water, while existing automated systems often rely on external power and lack integrated water recycling mechanisms. From the literature and system analysis, it is evident that combining IoT-based monitoring, closed-loop water filtration, and renewable-powered automation provides a comprehensive solution.

The proposed system addresses these gaps by introducing a high-pressure DC pump for effective cleaning, a closed-loop filtration unit for water reuse, and IoT-enabled monitoring for remote operation and scheduling. Powered directly by solar panels with battery backup, the system ensures energy independence and uninterrupted performance. This self-sustained design not only enhances solar panel efficiency and lifespan but also promotes water conservation and reduces maintenance costs. Ultimately, the project contributes toward smarter, eco-friendly, and resource-efficient solar power management.

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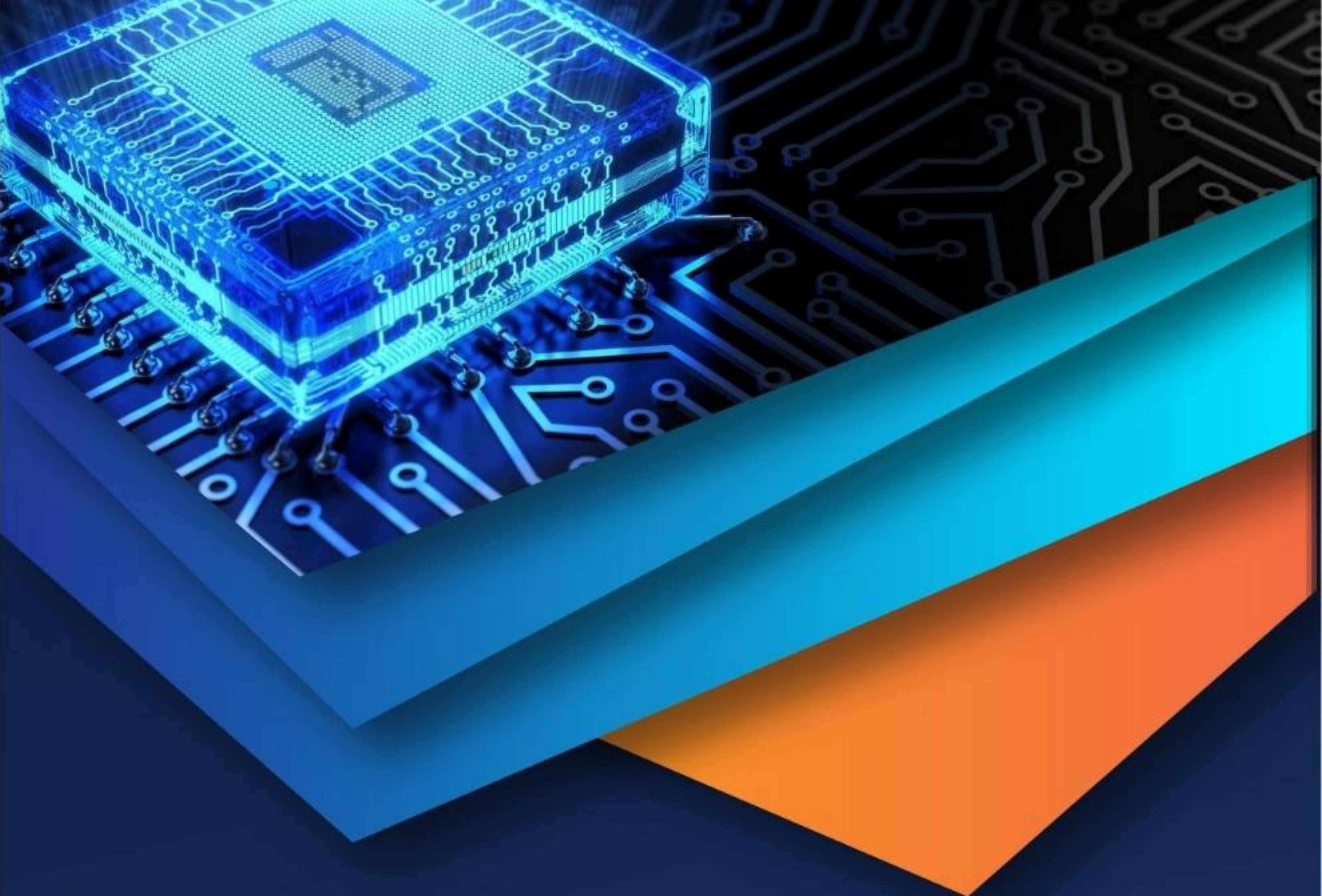

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