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Portable Solar Tracking and Charging System

1. VIKAS KUMAR, 2. SOUGATA SAMANTA, 3. SUMIT KUMAR RAI, 4. TAQWUIR ALAM,
5. Ms. SWAGATA BHATTACHARYA
[1]Student, [2]Student, [3]Student, [4]Student, [5]Assistant Professor
Department of Electronics and Communication Engineering,
Guru Nanak Institute of Technology, Kolkata, India

Abstract: This paper presents the design and implementation of a Portable Solar Tracking and Charging System aimed at improving the efficiency of solar power collection. The system can track the sun throughout the day to ensure that the solar panel is always aligned for maximum exposure. It is also portable, allowing the user to deploy it in various outdoor environments. The project integrates a microcontroller, solar panel, stepper motor, and sensors to achieve real-time tracking and efficient battery charging. This paper discusses the methodology, hardware components, and practical implementation of the system. Results indicate that the tracking system significantly improves energy capture compared to static panels.

***Index Terms* - Solar Panel, Tracking System, Renewable Energy, Battery Charging, Embedded System.**

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1 Renewable Energy and the Role of Solar Power

In today's world, the growing demand for energy and the environmental challenges posed by fossil fuels have led to a significant shift toward renewable energy sources. Among all the available renewable options, solar energy has emerged as one of the most promising and widely adopted forms. It is clean, sustainable, and abundantly available in most parts of the world. The conversion of solar energy into electrical energy is typically achieved using photovoltaic (PV) cells, which are used in solar panels.

Despite the growing adoption of solar technology, several challenges still exist that hinder its optimal utilization. One of the main limitations is the efficiency of solar panels, which largely depends on the intensity and angle of incident sunlight. Solar panels generate maximum power when sunlight strikes them perpendicularly. However, in most basic installations, panels are fixed at a specific angle, and the sun's position changes throughout the day. This causes a significant drop in the energy output, as panels are not always facing the optimal direction.

1.2 The Inefficiency of Static Solar Panels

A static solar panel setup is limited by its inability to follow the sun's trajectory during the day. As a result, the power generation remains suboptimal, especially in regions with limited sunlight hours. Studies have shown that solar tracking systems can increase energy output by up to 25–40% compared to fixed systems. This clearly emphasizes the need for smart tracking mechanisms that can dynamically adjust the panel's orientation based on the sun's position.

Moreover, another drawback of traditional systems is the lack of monitoring capability. If we don't have real-time data on voltage, current, and power, we can't easily tell if the solar system is working properly. This can cause problems to go unnoticed, reduce efficiency, and increase maintenance efforts.

1.3 Importance of Solar Tracking

A solar tracking system addresses this inefficiency by actively adjusting the panel's orientation to follow the movement of the sun across the sky. This enables the panel to always face the sun perpendicularly, allowing it to capture maximum solar energy and significantly improve its power output—by up to 30–40% compared to stationary panels.

There are mainly two types of solar tracking systems: **single-axis** and **dual-axis** trackers. While dual-axis trackers offer better alignment, they are often complex and costly. For smaller, low-power systems, a **single-axis tracking mechanism** offers a practical and efficient solution with minimal hardware and software requirements.

1.4 The Role of Portable Charging Systems

In many rural, remote, or mobile environments, the need for **portable charging systems** has grown significantly. Whether for emergency lighting, powering mobile devices, or small electronics, a compact solar power system that can track the sun and efficiently store energy is highly valuable. Such systems are particularly useful for:

- Remote villages with limited or no access to electricity.
- Disaster relief operations.
- Outdoor activities like camping or trekking.
- Educational demonstrations of renewable energy concepts.

1.5 Portability and Its Advantages

Portability is an essential feature in many practical scenarios. A portable system must be:

- Lightweight and compact.
- Battery-powered or solar-powered (no dependency on the grid).
- Capable of operating autonomously.
- Easy to transport and set up.

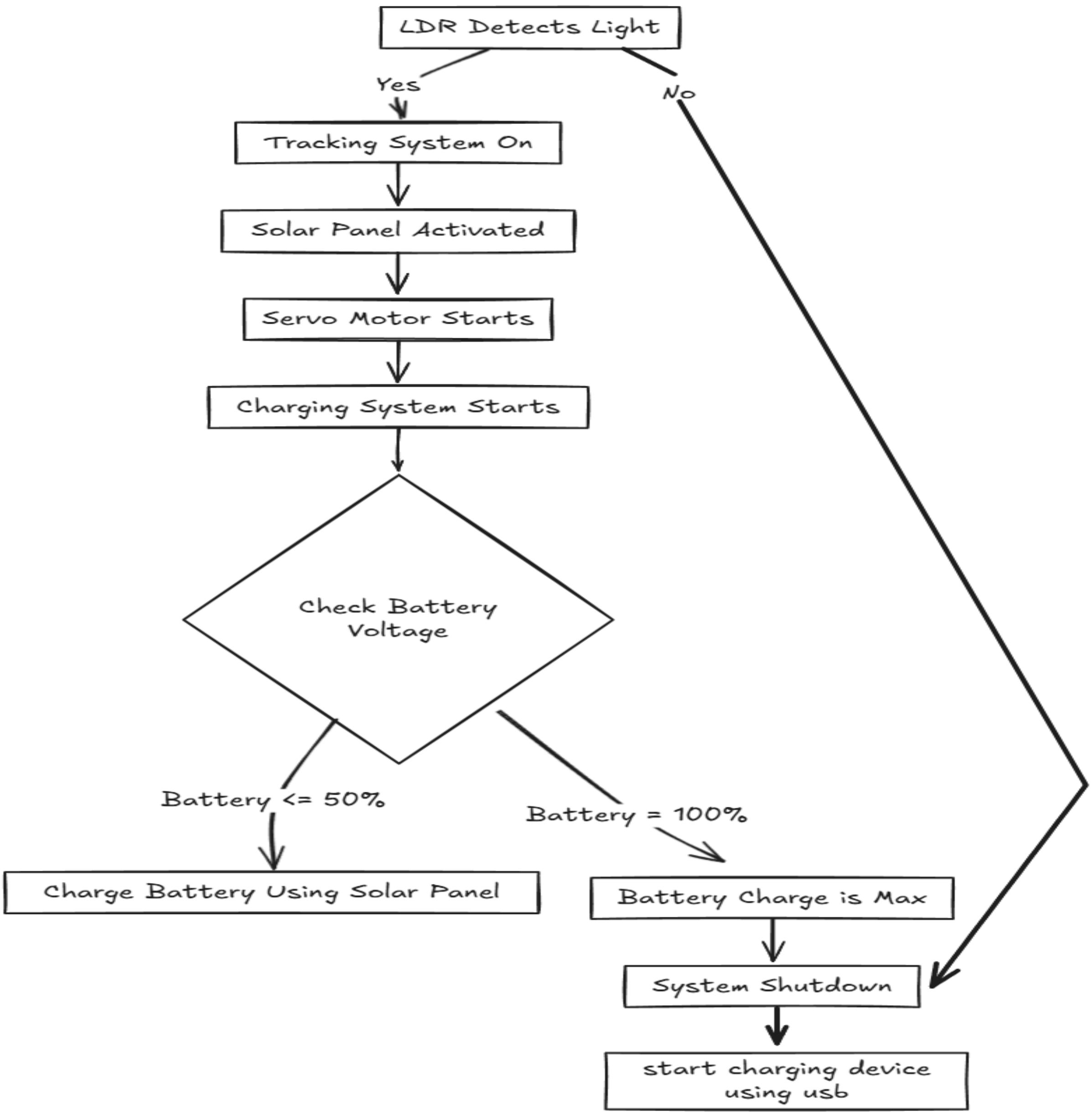
1.6 Objective of the Project

The aim of this project is to develop a **Portable Solar Tracking and Charging System** that:

- Uses **LDR sensors** to detect sunlight direction.
- Employs a **servo motor** to rotate the solar panel for optimal alignment.
- Utilizes an **ESP32 microcontroller** for data processing and system control.
- Incorporates **INA219** for real-time current and voltage monitoring.
- Features a **relay-controlled charging circuit** for battery management.
- Steps down voltage using a **buck converter** to ensure safe charging levels.
- Is designed to be compact, lightweight, and easy to use in remote or mobile environments.

2.MODEL PICTURE

3. BLOCK DIAGRAM



4. Implementation and Evaluation

4.1 Application Scope and Deployment Environment:

The project targets enhancing renewable energy accessibility in locations where conventional power infrastructure is either unavailable or unreliable. This includes applications such as mobile charging stations, emergency power sources, rural energy solutions, outdoor IoT sensor nodes, and portable devices for field research. These scenarios demand compact, efficient, and autonomous systems that can adapt to varying environmental conditions while providing consistent energy output. The prototype was designed keeping in mind portability, low cost, and practical usability in off-grid environments.

4.2 Hardware Components:

The system was built using the following key components:

- **Solar Panel (10W): Converts sunlight into electrical energy.**
- **ESP32 Microcontroller: Acts as the brain of the system, processing sensor input and controlling the servo motor.**
- **Servo Motors : Enable dual-axis rotation of the solar panel to track the sun both horizontally and vertically.**
- **LDR (Light Dependent Resistor) Array: Senses the intensity of sunlight from different directions.**
- **Battery Charging Circuit: Includes a charge controller, voltage regulation, and protection modules to ensure efficient and safe charging of a 12V rechargeable battery.**
- **Additional Components: Voltage sensors, diodes, relay modules, and a frame for mechanical movement.**

4.3 Embedded System Logic and Control Flow

The theoretical basis of the system lies in **sun tracking using light intensity gradients**. An array of four LDRs is positioned at different orientations (North, South, East, and West) on the panel. When the light intensity is imbalanced across the LDRs, it indicates that the panel is not optimally aligned with the sun. The ESP32 processes the analog signals from the LDRs and triggers the servo motor to adjust the panel until balanced intensity is achieved, ensuring perpendicular alignment with incoming sunlight.

The battery charging module uses:

- **TP4056-based charge controller**
- **Diodes for back-current protection**
- **INA219 sensor module for real-time measurement of battery voltage and current**

The system follows **maximum sunlight exposure logic**, i.e., it periodically checks for light intensity and rotates the panel until the highest light value is achieved. This ensures consistent real-time tracking without continuous movement (to conserve motor power).

4.4 Performance Evaluation and Data Analysis

To assess the effectiveness of the proposed Portable Solar Tracking and Charging System, a comparative performance study was conducted between a Static Solar Panel Setup and the Dynamic Solar Tracking System. The evaluation was performed under real-world conditions, with data recorded every hour from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Key parameters measured included Panel Voltage (V), Current (I), Power Output ($P = V \times I$), and Battery Charging Time. Data acquisition was performed through Arduino serial monitor logs for both configurations.

4.1 **Power Output Comparison**

The dynamic solar tracking system demonstrated a consistent improvement in power generation throughout the day. On average, the tracked system produced 20–30% higher power output compared to the static setup. This gain was most noticeable during early morning and late afternoon hours when the sun's angle significantly deviates from the panel's perpendicular axis in the static configuration.

4.2 **Battery Charging Efficiency**

The improved power output directly translated to better battery charging performance. The solar tracking system reduced the total battery charging time by approximately 25–35% under similar sunlight conditions. This enhancement is attributed to the system's ability to maintain optimal alignment with the sun, ensuring maximum energy capture throughout the day.

4.3 Sensor Response Accuracy

The system employed a Light Dependent Resistor (LDR) based feedback mechanism to detect changes in sunlight direction. The sensor system exhibited a rapid response time of less than 2 seconds to any significant change in the sun's angle, allowing the panel to promptly reorient and maintain optimal positioning.

4.4 **Weather Adaptability**

During periods of partial cloud cover, the tracking system successfully detected reductions in sunlight intensity and paused reorientation to prevent unnecessary movement. Once direct sunlight returned, the panel realigned itself within a few seconds, ensuring minimal loss in energy harvesting capability.

5 . RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this project affirm the hypothesis that real-time solar tracking enhances energy generation significantly. Compared to a fixed-position solar panel, the proposed system was able to maintain perpendicular alignment to the sun throughout the day, maximizing light capture.

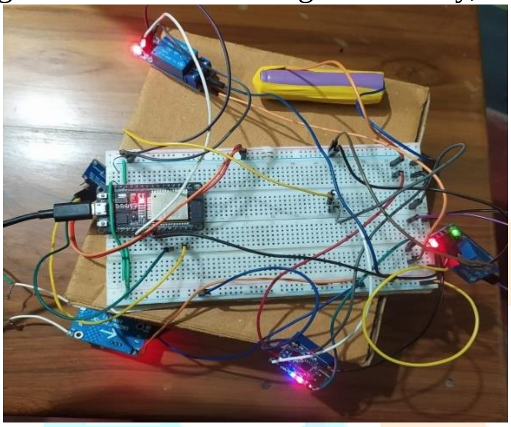


Fig. 5.1: SOLAR CHARGING SYSTEM

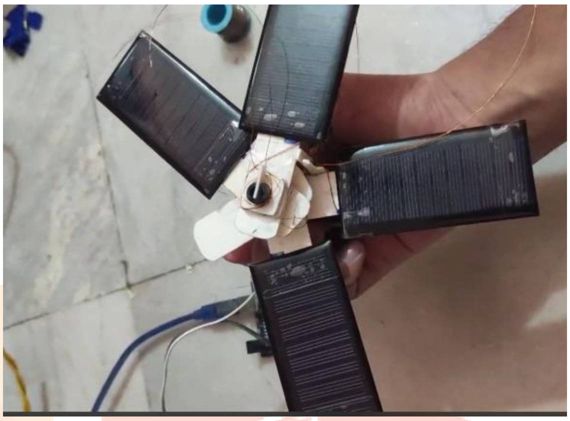


Fig. 5.2: SOLAR TRACKING SYSTEM

Key Findings:

- **Increased Efficiency:** Average increase in power output ranged from **20% to 30%**, depending on the day's weather conditions.
- **Faster Battery Charging:** The battery reached full charge approximately **1.5 hours faster** with the tracking system.
- **Robust Design:** The system automatically reset its position after sunset and realigned itself during the next sunlight cycle, ensuring autonomous operation.
- **Environmental Adaptability:** The design proved stable under wind and changing sunlight angles, and performance was unaffected by temporary cloud cover.

This result confirms the effectiveness of simple LDR-based tracking systems in improving renewable energy applications for remote locations. With minimal cost and widely available components, the prototype offers a scalable solution for clean energy deployment.

6 . CONCLUSION

Portable solar tracking and charging systems boost solar energy efficiency by dynamically aligning with the sun, achieving 20–40% more output than fixed panels. They are ideal for mobile use, such as outdoor activities and off-grid scenarios, offering eco-friendly power solutions. However, their higher cost, mechanical complexity, and maintenance needs can deter adoption. Advancements in lightweight materials and smart tracking algorithms are improving their reliability and usability. New innovations like AI-driven sun prediction and self-cleaning coatings address current limitations. Dual-axis trackers and modular designs are making systems more compact and efficient.

Future improvements in hybrid storage and affordability will enhance off-grid potential. Overall, they represent a promising step toward decentralized, efficient renewable energy solutions.

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