

Masala, Dipped or Hand-Rolled: What Indian Incense Are You Buying?



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Updated 18 Oct 2026 6 min read

Masala incense is rolled from a scented paste of resins, woods and herbs. Dipped incense is a plain charcoal or sawdust blank soaked in perfume oil and a solvent, and it is the cheaper tier that loses its scent fastest, especially in hot storage. Hand-rolled and machine-made describe how the stick was formed, and dhoop has no stick at all. Pack labels are unreliable on all of it, so test the stick and name the factory.

The Short Version

- Masala is a scented paste rolled on a core. Dipped is a plain blank soaked in perfume oil and a solvent.
- Dipped sticks have the shortest shelf life, and hot warehouses shorten it further.
- "Masala" and "hand-rolled" on a pack are unreliable. Break a stick and look.
- Nearly all commercial Indian incense uses some synthetic aroma chemicals, so "all natural" needs proof.
- A brand name does not fix a factory or a recipe, so name the factory, the city and the formula in your contract.

The type is about what the stick is made of and how the scent got there. Masala incense is rolled from a paste of resins, woods, herbs and binders. Dipped incense is a plain charcoal or sawdust blank soaked in perfume oil and a solvent, and it's the cheaper tier. It's also the type that loses its scent fastest in storage, which is the usual answer when a shipment that smelled fine at the sample stage arrives faint.

Here's a sentence from an incense forum in 2026 that every importer should read twice: "I've seen plain charcoal blanks get a light masala dusting purely

for the look" ([r/Incense, July 2026](#)). The word on the pack and the stick in the pack aren't always the same thing. Our [incense sticks page](#) covers the bamboo paperwork, the blend chemistry and duty by market. This page answers the narrower question buyers keep asking, what the types are and why scent fades. One caveat – the voices behind it are mostly Western enthusiasts and small sellers, not bulk importers, so treat them as signals.

SourcingFrom Intelligence

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- 01 **Dipped incense "has the shortest shelf life".** Enthusiasts also blame "overheated warehouses" for faded stock, while well-kept masala is said to hold its scent for decades. (*Our review of incense forum threads, 2026*)
- 02 **The solvent often isn't on the pack.** "Many dipped incense are made with DPG, but it's not disclosed on the package." (*Same review*)
- 03 **Good Indian incense is hard to find abroad.** A Vienna enthusiast said local shops "can't get the ones they've usually sold due to the import difficulties", and a US buyer finds Japanese sticks easier to get. (*Same review*)

What we don't know yet

- What the "import difficulties" in Europe are. We found no rule that explains them.

1. What Are the Main Types?

Five words cover most of what you'll be offered.

Type	What it is	What to know
Masala	A paste of resins, woods, herbs and binders, scented and rolled onto a bamboo core	The better class in enthusiasts' view. The paste runs right through the stick
Dipped	A plain charcoal or sawdust blank on a bamboo core, dipped in perfume oil and a solvent such as DPG	The low tier, cheap to scent in any fragrance, and the fastest to fade
Hand-rolled	How the paste or blank was put on the stick	Describes method, not quality. Masala and dipped blanks can both be hand-rolled
Machine-made or extruded	Blanks formed by machine, often from sawdust	Common under dipped lines. Not a fault if you're paying for it
Dhoop	A stickless cone or log of paste, dry or soft ("wet")	Enthusiasts treat good dhoop as a premium line

Neither family is wrong. A dipped stick in a strong, popular fragrance suits mass retail. A masala line suits a buyer who sells on scent quality and repeat purchase. The point is to pay for the one you're getting. "Expensive and prestigious incense, does not always mean good incense," as one enthusiast put it in 2026.

2. How Can You Tell Them Apart?

Break one and burn one. The break-and-burn check itself is described on the [incense sticks page](#). What this page adds is the third case, the dusted blank from the quote above, which shows a thin powdery skin over a plain dark core and is the one most likely to pass a glance at the pack. Enthusiasts also pass round a texture test for spotting dipped sticks, but the break is the check you can write into an inspection.

Do this on the sample, again on the pre-shipment lot, and write the type, the core material, the stick length and the stick weight into the order. Weight is a useful number, because a change in the paste or the dip shows up in it.

3. Why Does the Scent Fade?

Mostly because of the type and the heat. "In general, dipped incense has the shortest shelf life," an enthusiast wrote in September 2026 ([r/Incense, 2026](#)). The scent in a dipped stick is perfume oil sitting on the surface of the blank, so it evaporates. Another blamed faded stock on being "badly stored in one of those overheated warehouses". At the other end, one voice said old masala sticks "still smell lovely" after about 20 years.

Then there's drift. Buyers report that batches change and formulas get altered even at the biggest brands. So the scent you approved isn't guaranteed to be the scent that ships next year. For an importer that becomes a short list –

- **Compare every new lot against a sealed retained sample** from the lot you approved, not against memory.
- **Rotate dipped stock first**, and seal the inner packs well. Shipping timing and warehouse heat are covered on the [incense sticks page](#).
- **Agree in the contract** that any change to the formula or the factory needs your written approval.

4. Is Any of It "All Natural"?

Rarely, and it's hard to prove. "Many Indian incenses make heavy use of oils and a lot of them are synthetic aroma oils," one forum voice said in 2026 ([r/Incense, September 2026](#)), and a curator added that synthetics are likely used "here and there, as is often the case". Even a German maker of premium sticks said he uses nature-identical oils. That's normal practice,

not a scandal. It just means "all natural" is a claim you shouldn't print without the maker's written formula and a reason to believe it.

Turn the claim into a disclosure request. Ask which perfume oils are used, the safety data sheet for each, and the solvent in any dipped line. For the EU and UK, that disclosure feeds the allergen and labelling questions set out on our [incense sticks page](#).

5. Does the Brand on the Box Tell You Who Made It?

Not always. Enthusiasts report that at least one well-known Indian incense name is used by more than one maker, and that the sticks differ by which factory made them, down to one side hand-rolling masala while the other also runs dipped sticks on machine-made blanks (our review of incense forum threads, 2026). Buyers split on which they prefer. Same name, different factories, different product lines.

The lesson isn't about any one brand. It's that a name doesn't fix a recipe or a factory, and the factory city on the pack is a variable worth checking. The same holds for your own deal. Private label is a normal route, and one enthusiast describes European brands selling Indian-made incense under their own names, so if you do it, name the factory, the city and the formula in the contract. Formula ownership is covered in our [private label guide](#).

6. Where's the Opening for an Importer?

At the top end. Mass Indian lines are easy to find abroad, but enthusiasts in Austria and the US say premium masala and dhoop are not, and US buyers find Japanese incense easier to get. That's a gap a careful importer can fill, provided the stick is what it says and the stock arrives with its scent intact. If you'd like someone to visit makers, break-test sticks against your sample

and check the lot before loading, [SourcingSync](#) does that for foreign buyers.

Questions Buyers Ask

Is dipped incense bad? ^

No. It's the cheaper tier and fades fastest. Buy it as dipped, price it as dipped and rotate it quickly.

Does "hand-rolled" mean masala? v

Why did my second order smell weaker than the first? v

Can I sell Indian incense as natural? v