

# Becoming a Goddess

From eating disorders to low self-confidence, there is much that can cause you to question your beauty: photographer Samjhana Moon shows Tania Ahsan how she draws out the beauty in the women she works with

When Samjhana Moon begins the process of doing a goddess portrait session, she sends you a form that encourages you to regard the session as less of a photo shoot and more of a day to play and celebrate your beauty – no matter how alien the idea of being beautiful feels to you. She asks you to bring along some clothes with you in which you feel feminine and goddess-like. While she does do shoots where you can be nude, should you wish to be, there is no pressure to do so and if you prefer wearing a favourite dress or outfit, you can do so.

Since I knew that I would never be brave enough to do an au naturel photoshoot, I had a think about the clothes I loved. At first I couldn't think of any: I have struggled with weight problems almost all of my adult life and there are very few clothes I feel even okay in, let alone feeling myself to be beautiful and radiant in. I had a proper think and I remembered the phrase "like the heavens falling to the floor" in relation to my favourite blue sari. This had been a gift from my mother when I went away to university and the first ball I wore it at, I was tying it on and the yards of pure blue silk with silver embroidery was falling from my hips in a cascade to the floor. One of my best friends had come in to watch me tie the sari and she was enchanted by the glorious material. Hearing her poetic phrase, I realised how much I loved that sari.

My mother has a horror of wearing old clothes and, as the sari grew more and more threadbare with age and wear-and-tear, she begged me to recycle it or use it as summer curtains – anything but wear it in public. I realised that this would be the perfect opportunity to save the sari for posterity.

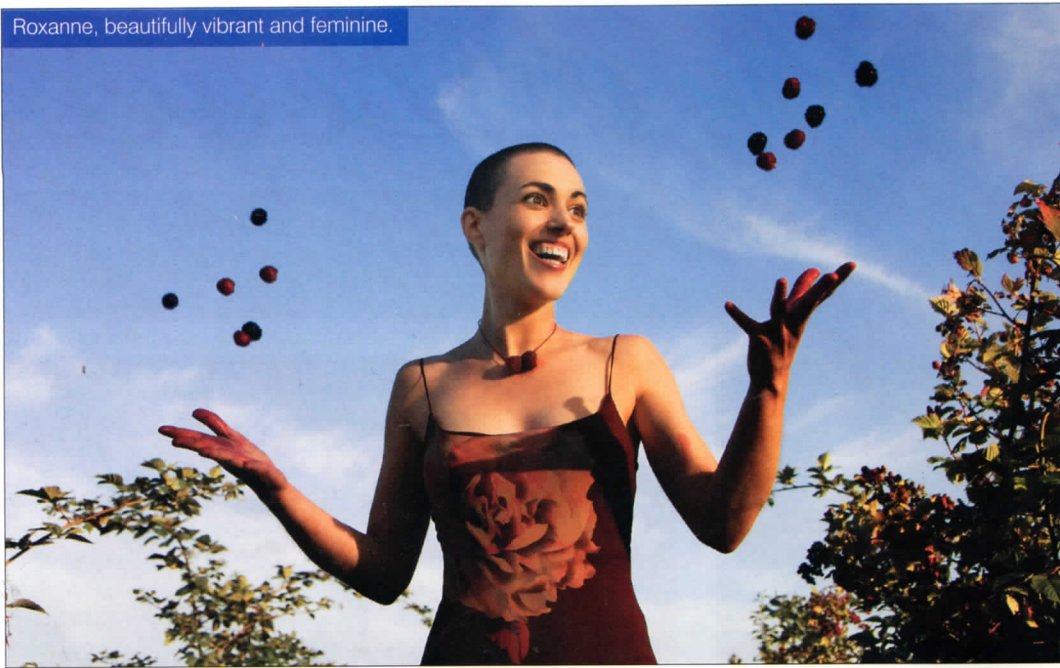
## Life-enhancing day

We meet at Richmond station as Samjhana thinks the beautiful Isabella plantation in Richmond Park will be ideal for my pictures. As we begin the day, I realise how long it has been since I've been in nature. It is a glorious day and the sun is shining (not always the best situation for a photographer as you can get awkward glare and reflections but perfect for a sun-worshipper like me). There are ancient oaks here, so old they have cavernous hollows within them. The deer in the park



Julie shows her dancer's agility.

Roxanne, beautifully vibrant and feminine.



are unfazed by the impressed tourists and obligingly pose for photos. I am in heaven, just walking around looking at everything and enjoying Samjhana's company; she is easy to be around and has a good eye for noticing unusual textures and colours.

I am usually very confident in front of a camera, having done quite a lot of TV work in the past, but I am usually not very happy with the results. Since I don't like seeing myself in pictures or on film, I've never learned which is my best side, how to pose to best effect, or even what is a typical gesture for me.

Once we locate the perfect spot for the main shoot, a secluded grove with a carpet of blossoms that have recently fallen, all pale pinks and whites on a rich mahogany base of mulchy goodness, Samjhana goes about setting up the shoot. You can't help but have warm feelings toward a photographer who talks to her light-reflecting umbrella stand. On previous shoots in studios, I've felt bored waiting around for the set-up but here I lie

*"To feel the wind in my hair and breathe in fresh air has given me the power and strength to be alive."*

down and look up at the canopy of trees and connect with the location, as Samjhana suggests I do. I feel a surge of gratitude go through me for the trees, the flowers, the sun and the many twists and turns of fate that brought me here to enjoy a day devoted to celebrating my unique beauty. If we are all manifestations of divinity then a day spent celebrating that fact is the least we can do for the goddess within.

Samjhana's own journey has been a fascinating one. Her unusual name was given to her on a trip to Nepal and her desire to channel spirituality into her work is obvious. Her technical expertise was developed from an early age as she got a job at Nikon in Surrey at the age of just 19. She worked there for seven years, through the development

and adoption of digital cameras. She set up a developing room in order to develop her printing work and she became adept at creating the sort of dynamic images she wanted to produce. She has an unerring judgement for the perfect shot.

Samjhana has done a lot of travelling in her time, doing corporate event management while living in Bermuda, and even being a professional athlete. All of these experiences have informed the setting up of Goddess Portraiture and she would like to work with companies as well as individuals to honour the divinity in all of us, and promote a more holistic approach to business.

As we start shooting, Samjhana uses her natural athleticism to climb up trees to get the right angle. She asks me to position myself in different ways, in order to get the best shapes, and she shows me the results on the digital camera as we progress. The attention to detail is absolute as she'll move fallen flowers (talking to them all the time!) in order

to get the right colour compositions.

A couple of weeks later, Samjhana comes by to give me my portraits. She is used to people crying in disbelief that it is actually them in the pictures. The photos are truly beautiful and I am amazed at how good they are but there are no tears because I suppose I have done a lot of work on myself to acknowledge my beauty and my divinity and this reinforced rather than surprised me with that knowledge.

### Sense of connection

Other clients Samjhana has worked with have had far more dramatic responses. For example, Julie (pictured opposite) was a dancer in the 80s and 90s who struggled with an eating disorder. Her session reminded

her of her inner strength and beauty and the effects on her life were far-reaching and wonderful. She began socialising again after 15 years and even celebrated her birthday with friends and family, without binging or purging, fully digesting her first meal for nearly 33 years.

"My session with Samjhana was much more than a photo-shoot," says Julie, "[it was] a therapeutic experience, truly uplifting and confidence boosting! To feel the wind in my hair and breathe in fresh air has given me the power and strength to be alive."

Samjhana explains the philosophy behind her work: "We women today face a multitude of challenges

from the media and society to shrink into the mould of 'the beautiful woman'. With these daily pressures it's easy for us to focus on the things we would like to change instead of loving our unique qualities as we are in this moment. A Goddess Portrait session will help you to focus on your best features and increase your body confidence." The photo Samjhana did for me is certainly one of the best that has ever been taken of me and my much-loved sari has star billing in it, however, that wasn't what made the day special. What enchanted me was being in nature with a talented person passionately aligned to capturing the divinity in us all. ks



Tania in her favourite blue starry sari.

### More information

Visit [www.goddessportraiture.co.uk](http://www.goddessportraiture.co.uk) for more information. Book your session before August 31st and receive a 10% discount on your session price and a free 9x6" print of your Goddess Portrait. Email [samjhana@goddessportraiture.co.uk](mailto:samjhana@goddessportraiture.co.uk) or call 07749 543 469 to book.

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