May 3 this year, the Isleworth Crown Court convicted Pahalagama Somarathana, a high profile Sri Lankan Buddhist monk living in Britain, on four counts of indecent assault. He was on trial for crimes he committed more than thirty years ago, when he sexually assaulted a 9-year old girl. The monk was then 33.

Victims state that attacks took place over a period of time, where the girls were enticed by the monk with sweets. The court heard that one girl was attacked in the shrine room, another reportedly in the monk’s living quarters. The girl who had been assaulted in the shrine room was told that if she revealed what had happened to her, he would kill her father.

He faced nine charges of rape, and was convicted on four counts of indecent assault. He was sentenced to seven years in prison by the presiding judge, who spoke at length about how the actions of the monk permanently scarred the adult life of one of the victims.

Below, we reproduce excerpts from the sentencing remarks made by the presiding judge, with the names of the victim removed.

JUDGE MATTHEWS: You are clearly a young man of some ability, because within 3 years or so, you were entrusted with the setting up and

development of the temple in Selsdon, where from the start you were the chief Buddhist monk, and you retained that role over some 30(?) years or more. Simultaneously you’ve been central to the development of an orphanage and school, together with the temple in Gampaha in Sri Lanka, and you have a devoted following in both countries. However, within weeks of your arrival in Chiswick, you committed the first of four indecent assaults on a young girl, who was aged 9 at the time. The first three of these assaults took place in your room at the temple. The attraction for the 9-year-old was the offer of fruit polos. On the first of those occasions, while seated at your desk, you put your hand under her dress and under her knickers and touched her in the area of the vagina. Each of the two subsequent occasions followed a similar pattern but progressing to you penetrating her vagina with your fingers. The fourth and final occasion moved from your room to the shrine room. You were dressed in your robes, you pushed her against a wall, you pulled her knickers down, you inserted your fingers into her vagina. She felt excruciating pain. You said if she told anybody, not only would her mother be very angry, but her father would die. This crime, the fourth and final occasion, has been difficult for many to comprehend, the digital penetration of the vagina of a 9-year-old in the shrine room, in the presence of the Buddha. A betrayal of your religion, betrayal of the Sri Lankan Buddhist community in this country, but above all, a betrayal of the breach of the trust placed in you by XXXXXX XXXXXXXX and others on her behalf, not least her parents, who were strong supporters of you at the time.

You pleaded not guilty. Your mitigation is inevitably limited. The conduct of your defence involved pointing the finger of blame at your fellow monks. I make it clear that’s not an aggravating feature but it does nothing to assist your mitigation. There has been, even now, a total absence of remorse, you preferring, if the author of the pre-sentence report is correct, to allow, if not encourage, your public to believe that this is all a terrible mistake. I take into account of course the loss of your good name. I bear in mind the passage of time that has elapsed since, and the very many good things that you have undertaken during that time. However, it cannot be said that at the age when you committed these offences you were young and immature.

I take into account that you are now aged 66. And when I read all the tributes, the glowing tributes paid to you by very many people in places high and low, and indeed I heard many of them speak very eloquently about you during the course of the trial. I have read your personal letter to me, and I’ve read everything that’s set out in the pre-sentence report, and I’ve listened very carefully to the very able submissions made on your behalf by Mr. Stone.

The principles the court should follow in cases of this kind, as both counsel have reminded me, are correctly set out in a case called Hall(?), a recent case reported last year, and I am also reminded that when I consider the seriousness of the case, that a section of the Criminal Justice Act 2003, section 143, directs me to look at the offender’s culpability in committing the crime and any harm it causes.

When you said to XXXXX XXXXXXX that she mustn’t tell anyone because her father would die, she believed you, such was your power. And she says in her victim impact statement that she felt as if everything in her life had changed. She loved school, where she was already an outstanding pupil, but she was forced to spend substantial periods away. Her parents who, I repeat, were great supporters of you, had no idea what had gone on. Her (inaudible) doctors (inaudible) brought in a consultant paediatrician to see her. Fortunately for her and indeed for you, that particular crisis period passed. But as she got older and matured, she says – I’ve no reason to disbelieve her – that it affected her relationships with those closest to her, in particular her previous partner and her husband. And if truth be known, the full extent of the impact of your behaviour on her will never be known.

I pass sentence in accordance with the sentencing regime in force at the time of the offences, and the maximum sentence for indecent assault on a female under 13 years of age was 5 years. And in passing sentence, I bear in mind the principle of totality. So please stand up.

The sentence I pass in relation to count 1 is one of 12 months’ imprisonment, on count 2, 2 years’ imprisonment, count 3, 3 years’ imprisonment.

All those to be concurrent to each other. In relation to count 5, 4 years’ imprisonment, but consecutive to the 3 years on counts 1, 2 and 3, making a total of 7 years altogether