

My Nine Lives – Chapters of a Possible Past. Ruth Praver Jhabvala.
John Murray 2004. £16.99

Ruth Praver Jhabvala's reputation as a novelist and screen writer make this, her latest publication, an eagerly anticipated treat.

The quality of writing, eye for detail, and ability to convey the utmost richness in a few words, evinced by, among others, her Booker prize winning novel Heat and Dust, gives My Nine Lives a pedigree to which it admirably lives up.

The author describes the nine chapters that comprise the book as 'potentially autobiographical', and the reader is at all times eager to gain insight into her life through the fictional – but how much? – lives of her nine heroines. The subjects inhabit worlds that reflect Ruth Praver Jhabvala's own life experience, and are eloquently expressive of the many strands – sometimes in harmony, at others in conflict – of her life, including her Jewish heritage, her love of and fascination with India and the Indians, and the places in which she has lived, India, America and England.

My Nine Lives is short story writing of the highest quality, indeed I would be amazed, and disappointed, if it did not pick up a top literary award during the next twelve months.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh