Two books have taken me to a deeper emotional core this year than almost anything I have read in ten years. They have engaged with me so sharply and clearly that the ordinary aspects of life seem mundane by comparison. Both books are written by Khaled Hosseini.


This is a deeply harrowing story, full of anguish and pity. It is a harsh condemnation of the way our human life can be devalued and destroyed. To say that it helps the reader to understand just the smallest aspect of life in Afghanistan would be an over-statement: nothing could prepare you for what Mariam and Laila experience in this book. Hosseini writes through Laila towards the end:

[She] marvelled at how every Afghan story is marked by death and loss and unimaginable grief. And yet, she sees, people find a way to survive, to go on. Laila thinks of her own life and all that has happened to her, and she is astonished that she too has survived, that she is alive and sitting in this taxi listening to this man's story.

Hosseini's writing is breath-taking. It grips in a vice that is both painful and unbearable, yet you can't put it down. You see the landscapes, weather, buildings, rooms and streets as if they
were outside your own window. He paints unimaginable horrors and yet shows how the human will survives. Just reading it, I am reduced to tears again on several occasions. And yet, through all this suffering, the 'thousand splendid suns' that is Hafez's poetic reference to Kabul, rises again. Read it.