The stony image of Prime Minister Modi, the democratically elected leader of a sovereign nation on the cover page of an internationally acclaimed magazine speaks volumes. Two articles in a single issue with focus on one person speak more than the picture. What is the purpose behind the publication of these articles? What are the forces which make an attempt to steer the narrative on India at a politically sensitive time when this huge democracy is going to the polls? These are the questions that haunt as one tries to delve into the details of the journalistic accounts of the articles.

Without going into the background and parentage of the journalist which may lead to the accusation of ‘shooting the messenger’ the motivation behind the writing of the articles does incite more than simple curiosity. A few years back in 2004 the same magazine had acclaimed an IAS officer from Bihar as the TIMES Asian Hero who was later accused of a flood relief scam and jailed. That incident and the current articles on the ruling party leader when the country is undergoing elections cannot be dismissed as journalistic rigour unbiased by other forces. The credibility of the publication calls for scrutiny and the purpose behind the publication must indeed be probed.

Getting back to the current issue, there is a three-page article on Modi and the economic prosperity of India and another nine-page long article denouncing Modi as the chief divider. The so-called division calls for thorough investigation by looking at the political and cultural heritage of India.

The first question that comes to mind is- When was India not divided in the lines of religion and caste? Isn't the killing of terrorists and the general public at the border an everyday feature that every Indian seems to have become insensitive to? Isn't it a fact that there are Indians who feel close to people from their own religion even if they don’t share the same motherland? Of course, it may be a reality that they would be reluctant to accept the peril of the other nation and give up the prosperity of their own motherland. Isn’t the animosity that kills people every day on some religious pretence or other a clear testimony to the fact that India is divided even after seventy years of so-called secularism?

Perhaps the only change that has happened with the Modi government and which the article terms as populism is that for the first time in the history of independent India the vast majority of Indians have started taking pride in their cultural heritage. The so-called secularism proclaimed in Independent India called for the protection of minority. Durga Puja celebration was secondary to respect for minority rights. Can faith and heritage only be the rights of minorities?

Perhaps the emerging middle class with its access to economic prosperity is claiming access to cultural heritage and religious hegemony. This economic prosperity and hunger for technology by Indians see Modi as one who can make them feel proud of their heritage. He is perhaps the only leader who has the will power to steer this billion plus population on the road to economic prosperity. The combination of these myriad forces can be attributed to the success of Modi as a leader and could be termed as populism by some. And this has perhaps called the attention on him, albeit in a negative way, from the international media. Although the question as to whether the writer of the article can vouch for his international status or otherwise remains to be proved.

Much has been written by the political parties from both sides of the fence on the articles. It is perhaps time that the intellectuals of India along with others who are increasingly exposed to international agencies and global political pressures realise the motives behind such publication by the foreign media. Not everything foreign is adorable.